



light > space > comfort > security > luxury



NO MONEY

#2

DRAG

AND

DROP

CONTAINING

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Early Morning
NAOMI WEBER

As we fall deeper into love and years go on, we build up resistance to each others fluids. I no longer wait next to you as you piss, reaching my hand into the stream, turning to you with a grin. Now I lie my chin down on this desk, watch leaves blowing off trees through wind, and listen to you move around in another room.

Now I am old, I am drunk more and less humourless. I sleep longer, like I did when I was a baby. I place plastic flowers in big clay pots of soil and water them daily, and check on their progress, and think yes, what a brilliant gardener I am. Love for all bad worlds streams out from the wound in my thigh. And what would I say now. I would say hello. Though I am okay, hello, though I do fret. Now when I am old I might decide I liked my hair like that, greasy. My fingers through it like a dirty man in an old song.

The one constant in a life is its loneliness, which is a tremble at the far flung centre that keeps the hurt going. Surprised at first. The one constant in a life is this loneliness, which daily I am happy to receive so I know I can want. So I know I am thinking under the sky of the world where we have been born from a body. Now that I know what to make so achingly, so I cling to my arms like a cliff.

LOUD CRACKLING SOUND

JUSTIN KATKO

If you have been moved by Dostoevsky or Camus, what's in store for us will not disappoint. But we are disappointed. Look how many disappear from us. Yet there is a negative vitality in London. In London there is a negative particle that is alive. And it is a very small negative particle, but it is in fire and it is there living. Living fire against the servility that every expression and gesture is laced with, apologetic for fucking just being alive. Yet so the particle is fire visible. It is visible, ready to leap out from Tottenham. In flame-ass wild superior hair. In the afternoon uniformed pole climber. In the child paint scraper, his curls bouncing and feet flying. All of them powerful the holders of the particle. Let us ask them to come bring the flame of their hair. Through the pricedoutless lifebulge. Through the Arbeitslosengeldchlüsseler-zuegungsrezeptabstend. Knowing everything could in a minute be given straight up. That the smallest sound we get is proof that the collapse is so imminent everyday within minutes, even seconds, against news items muscular demapped across the no-ramp to fluxulate oblivion, as purchase.

I see the negative particle in writing that I knock upon my front door from the inside on out to the street, wait a minute or so, knock again, and then open it, emerging naked, carrying all of the musical instruments I could gather in my arms, crouched over dropping them, looking very unconvincing, and then arranging them desperately, playing them all at once very catastrophically, and I sing across the street, sad-triumphant: *O child, wild paint scraper, son of your father the man scraping paint correct and efficiently, O child who is working so free and so hard, whose legs are flying incredibly out beneath his furious scraping, who as you are certainly in age far far under sixteen or seventeen, is not guaranteed a minimum wage, where even at sixteen you would only receive £3.87 per hour, and then at eighteen only just £5.30 per hour, and then at 21 how only £6.70 per hour, and that wage perhaps until you die, and you will die, O you who bring so much brutal sound of stretched ringing so close to my ear flaps, which fold themselves closed like the sensitive plant against such the luxury of negativity enparticled in sonic fire which your labour engenders? How O can such scrape sound and clanging be brought into me, hard through the passage of my cerebral audio membrane, negating them excessively? How can so much joy and so much pain now be inside of me?*

I see the negative particle resonating morphologically in aphid flee-form among the restricted population of the rosebush outside my window, where I kill the aphid seed-points on the flower buds pre-blossom and the underleaves at stem on most days with my fingers, mashing them into a gooey green-clear liquid. And it is known that ants maintain aphids in plantation systems to harvest some elixir or blood that they drink on. And what happens is that once I have destroyed six or seven or eight even seed-points, then I look around for perhaps one minute or even two, and I perhaps then discover one abundant seed-point that I had not yet discovered, however close it might have been to me. And I see then, and have seen this several times now, that the large aphid or aphids responsible for the seeding there do something extraordinary: they flee. And the flee-form is, among aphids that I have observed, both green and red, and even white, not a regularity. Though aphids fall from leaf at merest tremble if they are wrongly purchased (which, it might argued, is itself a flee-form, releasing the grip in order to fall to the camouflage of the extensive ground beneath, and go on to generate another host), I do not see them often locomote upon their appendages, down a stem to evade my murderous fingers. They run for their lives, and though they do not get far, they do show to me the negative in particle as fire, dancing in flight before sure death in a resistance that is the particle in conscious knowledge of danger, manifest as flee-form, and if somehow more seed-points could realise the flee-form from the moment of the damager's arrival, rather than only after several aphid seed-points have been terminally dispatched, then many of the adult aphids and their subsequent multiple generations would be protected. Such evolutionistic advance would be the generalization of the negative particle, gesticulating wildly against the melted torso of the particular, riding up the elevator through the deadly smokebank of generality.

Million-tongue drum weapon glance, desire is necessary, is necessary in keeping the negative particle alive in your eyeholes, in the permanence of intensity in ocular display, letting iris crackle negative with wrinkles out of time spent looking in the face of truth of all flavours make you vomit from surplus at the wheel with your hands to your face shrieking with the friend of negativity holding the wheel patiently, forged as a scorch-pattern ciphered against social control. Seek the one frequency that either you bump or you do not.

from Against the Frame

AZAD SHARMA

3rd Frame

The typhoons and tornados
will drop their bombs
within hours of democracy.

Party divisions are fault
lines for speech-talk
and here I am your terrorist
sympathiser kneading
earthy dough out of Abu
Ghraib's ash works.

Above invisible crosshairs
the pane incarcerates damages.
You emerge fluffy with *affect*
open-ended and disillusioned
by the festival of corpse exhibitions.
These amnesties of analysis
are journalistic without empathy
for regions unattended by software.

Sykes-Picot? *Wallah!* lets go
back there and snooze for freedom.
 that mantra of false monochrome flags
 permits Sam Harris's epidemiology of Islam
 or the infidel within Doug Murray's fortress,
 how awful ! to let *ars historica* tick over
 and vindicate itself in the midday shadow.

More white foreskins
must preen as satire
with human rights
to vote offence
and make Arab grave
for occident cenotaph spectaculars.

Those sanctimonious pirates have come
to put dream works on steel slats
offering detain-ships in security
to limbless orphans of dictators.
Their policy is a terrific bunkbed
flash-banging your mind against bricks.
Those photographs were examples
of sexual progress and liberalism
even prisoners can beat democratic,
militarised bent back double
gagged live on tube hubs next to Saddam's hanging.

from **THE ANTHOLOGY OF POEMS BY DRUNK WOMEN**

LISA JESCHKE

(From The Anthology of Poems by Drunk Women)

**Rather groped in Cologne
Than marry a man
That's my New Year's
Resolution.**

**Yes, you heard right,
Fucking, suited AfD groom,
Defending me, with your might?**

**Man of status, your soul up eaten by fear,
Domestic acronym, make room:
Hands off my country!**

from **S O R B E T**

LUKE ROBERTS

Nous n'étions pas crédules. Nous étions entourés.

I have it on good authority:

men on horseback
from what we call history

the sun in their eyes

the Caspian sea

I have it on good authority: the sun here is embarrassing, too weak to trust the brackets talking, too many infringements to live with. I watched it coming back, sick among the member states, awake on my front with you behind. It was too early and carbonated. The sun on the horses and the naming of storms. It was too early and carbonated. The lake was mute, white, and grey, and as I stood beside it searching the undergrowth I understood that this was the only answer I wanted to give: it was too early and carbonated. It was amazing: smoke in one section and the tortoise-shell for safekeeping, rising to the surface and sinking. The geese there shared secrets, private terror and humiliation, timed to the disappearance of vessels. At night, lights on the horizon would warn them to stay low, to keep the feathered chorus to a minimum. Who makes the most noise nerveless, who makes the turbulent details? My information is hardly supported. But the story in its purest form is simple: to steal a tiger's cub you need mirrors and a horse, and I don't know which one to admire. The thief has a mean spirit, he has the sun in his eyes, he has the freedom to do what he wants. But the maternal position is a love letter to litters I sometimes wish to

relate. You can read it on wall-hangings, in expensive books, with a face illuminated by exquisite lamps. The wall-hanging is turquoise. The background of the drawing is burnished with gold. But the sun here is embarrassing, soaking the threads, erasing the details. All the dead ferns are orange; all the berries are red. The dead things indeterminate fold out historically, to conjure the honest, make the honest grit, so the shape of his face starts to change. My bestiary is timid and slow. I was setting out to make my collection. It was too early and carbonated. I had a jar in my backpack, and it made the most beautiful sounds.

The blackbird and sparrow duet:

how will I think this
ransom especially
when the day moon is visible
the things I thought up
go bad overnight—
It hurt my heart
he said—
& how should I think this
wet field of abrasion
abstract & physical
when the furthest is early
and the nearest is rending—
It hurt my breast
he said—
& have I exhausted

informers & less so
explained it in detail
moonlit & less so
when the stars are evasive
heavy with sleep—
It came to my window
& showed me my failings
returned to my handling
ready to keep—
It flew from the window
slow for survival
& the sails are unbalanced
heavy with grief

The whole conceit is that this is spoken by animals, specifically little flocks of birds. The birds face perils, mainly hunting season, which ends as mating season begins. I know this because I've seen the men in camouflage stalking through the fields, reading aloud incredible lists: gentle falcon, gentle quail, the lark and dove and jealous swan who sings against his own death. Who you correspond to is non-negotiable. In the shade a measured part, served in luminous twists. There are fatigues for everyone. Into this wetland we fold our own protective measures, our own camouflage, our own feathers. To make pleasant complaint work like a mirror.

He works an on/off switch in the big space above his head:

Assembled & abjured & abdicated
simple and declarative, strung so
with latches for clockwork:

but what I'm describing's
unmade falling, turned & turned
about. I reach forwards—

the way you say mirror
or said it, nobody's fiction
unfolds with a clean legal theory
solemn in advance of the group.

The announcement goes long in the forest; all anxiety survives in the mouths of borrowed elements; the lake began to overflow. From the desolate speakers we heard a faint protest, calculated to offend the distinction between wants and needs. Putting the jar to my lips I felt the slip given catch up. Hunting dogs flush from the right. Some of them had books in their mouths, which, you admit, you like. Once you realise your hands are empty there is no voluntary exile worth keeping. I lost my aphorisms. I lost my aphorisms, he said.

Diplomatic mission:

But we'll still call you by the same name
said all the animals, under-stated
in a message scratched on bark.

Weren't we volatile enough to turn
the pieces into lively objects?

To splice the rumours
with confusion of roles

and speech extravagant?

This is the meeting place.

This is not the meeting place
we agreed on.

Who taught you to think
like that, sweet & nasty

in envious teeth
you render restlessly

what else kind of poetry
is there

An original poem by René Char:

This is an original poem by René Char:

The swift's wings are too big, crying with joy
when he circles the house: such is the heart.

He absorbs clouds. When he touches the ground
he tears at his feathers with his beak like a pelican.

He duets with the swallow. He hates his family.
Nothing from the tower gives him any pleasure.

With the sparrow he lives in a cave. He will sue
everyone who gave him such terrible advice.

Over the summer all his legal fictions unravel.
At midnight he is insulted by moonlight.

Because he makes too much noise the hunter
will shoot him dead. The heart is his proof.

Plumes alternately solemn:

Now we're in a different book
 but the planes are still vague
so you choose to write vaguely
 flood the detail with creatures
like the cinnamon bird
 broken by lead—
give me courage with a split lip
 out loud, did you say that?
give me courage
 half-spoken half-sung
to keep concealments dry
 by listening — by listening
to my daylight fitness
 calling on delicate features—
white grass on my tongue
 on my tongue white grass
like a widow for the season
 a nothing confess.

Nothing but grass and cut-outs:

Because my heart
was stupidly arranged
I presented a voice

imagined rejoinders
parental

Because my heart
was stupidly arranged
I wanted fewer
dependent clauses
& no facts at all

Two Poems
CHRISTINA CHALMERS

1.

Hoax cleavages,

Where my breasts run high to my hilt and

I am holding them up to nothing.

Getting wet or having a party,

Writing and propping up your cellar

With books until it is nothing but

Full. I go to art, where there is pure

Faintless, growling as when marriage or

Darkness... What music do you like?

I say: the scratched surface of an egg.

If, Where the rivers run dry, I will have

A party will it be often or never? What,

As the nail varnish on my choking

Vanishes, Will be the glacial remainder

In the cinema of two soul's mishaps,

Called events should the mood so

Happen to take You that you do

So. But i am forgetting

myself. There Is only my baked eroticism

to blame, wanda Character 1 meeting

Jane number 2, height 15m dead body

Crane mirrored angle. How, when we

Go on strike please forever yet again,
Will we be able to remote make a distance
Between however therefore and so and so.
And yet, on Another boat, would it be this way?
I apologise for myself and for all my
Friends and for all my enemies. The
Apology is directed mostly and
Often to Frau Muller. Please kindly,
May I offer my dead blue cat.
May I give you my betterer.
May I lend him to you.
May I fill her with the sparks of
Dead possibilities.
May she lie forever in your lap.

2.

the burnt out fire station, brown & fatal red
motor cable lost on the plaza of a loved one. Mental
barrier of a tenement, box house sunk in breadth
seedless bask in tone of allure. At home, blades
of grass as only food, artificial & Pearl Vision, know
hunger. Walk then in cherry-blossom fire, proxy revolt
out of bounds, the food courses through. Take motor vision,
leave over nostalgia as memory in the fat of it. The bone

is artificial in the size of a vista, I see myself as a character
in Minor Eroticism, a city fended from park spring and
cable car. The papers become the poems, blue shift
official writ, but will my poems be marked as wrong? Shrift
to international waters, writing stomach on the sea. The
small black blades come into archways wend to flag
paradise, this concatenation of mad, unending dream. I
at home in the translucency of arrival will never
have anything to declare. The origin
mark signalling the person I will not be able to forget,
even under questioning. Not to myself, to
the burnt out fire station

from 'Universal Attainment Centre II'

ED LUKER

Taxpayers: I want to know in what part of this I can put in myself in. Where do I fit best most the first time klaxon. Warning. Check your engine oil. The I is something you fill up with my feelings until you spill out the picture. Spit me out after chewing me up. I want to keep you in the picture. It all hangs in the balance as we walk down to know abatement. Suspended upon the premise of a return we come back to what we felt most intimately as lost, to be surpassed in the moment of rebate. The seasonal shift back to the centre. I tried to hold you, I mean I tried to help you. I mean you were a danger to yourself and I had to restrain you. It may have felt like that was my knee in the small of your back because it was, but I have to stress that you really were a danger to yourself. Look, please calm down. The light weaves its balance between the newly sprung traps. Each first flash of the glimmer of new dawn brings its curse, its cleanliness, its ugly mire of wages and debt, and the conditions whose misery is constructed around the absence of either. All you have to do for me is think about that, really possess so fix your attention on that presence as a centre. Really inhabit what it would mean to surmount that image for you alone. That's not what I meant. Don't go there. Why did you try to put *that* there. I know this is a learning process and we can expect some minor detours from the attainment of that which is most present, but I really need you to concentrate for me. Some requests are very simple, that is I will ask them of you when I know absolutely that you are ready to meet them. This will take several months of torturous adjustment. You do not know that it will take several months. You only realise that it will take several months after they have finished. They have not finished. I do not know if you know this or not. It is not important what you think of me as a mentor, it is only significant that we have a good working relation. The relation works. Perhaps you are not aware of this. Perhaps you will have to be made aware of this. The stick. Hurt inhabits words, it compresses itself in the curvature of their spine. The crack. The stretch. Straighten out each line and follow it to the end. This is the ethics of disregard, pay close attention to it. I am straightened out of my bad habits.

For that I am thankful. Thank you. What do you even fucking thank. You wake up robed but somehow still handcuffed to the radiator. It is not a radiator any more but has somehow transmuted into a pole. It is not a pole but more a link or hoop drilled and cemented into a brick wall. It is not a wall but rather a thick piece of highly reflective sheet metal. Is not a sheet of metal but rather the attenuation of every inch of your spirit compressed into a cube of high density black matter lock back in the hotel room in Balbec now taking the form of appearance of a mini bar. You help yourself to an overpriced drink, because, y'know, sometimes, fuck it, and in inhabiting that moment you drink every moment of your physical extension into the world that does not want you as an experience of absolute belonging. Why didn't you get me a fucking drink. This is meant to be something reassuring. It is like ownership of your dispossession, but the problem is that this extension out from the thing which would heed to force you back into a limit is nothing more than flipside of that which compresses you. A topsy turvy tequila slammer. You try to take this in your stride. You neck each drop of your dispossession, as dry ice evaporates off the surface of this unknowable liquid and some sort of heady relief of pressure starts to push itself out of your nostrils. You stare at this smoke. It is full of memories. You gaze deeply into these memories and you can identify that they are good. This is pleasing for me. I am pleased for you. If you cannot remember, my best memories of yours are the ones you currently feel most indifferent about. This does not meet up to my expectations. Quite frankly, I think you are being a little ungrateful but seeing as you can't currently even talk I suppose I will have to let you off. Who is letting me off. Let us off. In this brief interaction with the attenuation of your spirit curated by the aggressive interlocutor of an 'I' you have lost sight of what it means to inhabit that which you find most positively reassuring. Is it pornography. It might be but that would be telling. Somethings are *verboden*. Ver- what? Forget it. But giving is good. I get that giving is good but I don't get why you don't think that some things shouldn't be given. Well that depends who is doing the giving. I don't think you get it. I think I do fucking get it I just don't think you should try and give what people don't want to get. Maybe people need to be given something that they don't want to get yet. Maybe, *just maybe*, they will only be capable of being given something they don't want to get at exactly the point in time that

they suddenly become capable of being given it. *Perhaps*, just *perhaps* it is in the interests of people, against their better judgment, that they are given things they are not quite ready for. This is a question of force, disregard its object. For language is the wound. Or language is not the wound but language is the object of this particular wound. I am open to new things most of the time but I think that at this particularly point in time you are closing me. Look, I don't want to talk about wounds. If I can't talk to you about wounds how do you expect me to dress them? I don't have any wounds. How do you know that you don't have any wounds when you can't even see straight. Why can't I see. This 'I' interlocutor is becoming increasingly aggressive. I don't think that they understand quite how much you need your own space right now. Both of your hands are folded over one another in your lap. You lift your right hand up and try to stretch it out above the right side of your body. An extension occurs but it is not total. Somewhere along the way the skin on your fingers is abraded against the wall. Fortunately there is more room on the left side but you can't quite see how much. Having no choice you continue to keep your eyes closed. What do you mean you have no choice, no '*necessary external factors*', remember? I don't think you are quite getting to the bottom of this. Where is Norman. Someone call Norman. He has been here all along. You appreciate that force is something that sometimes has to have an application to bodies, for their own safety, but you want to add as a demand for the application of this force that sometimes it is an issue that must be dealt with delicately. Look, this barely needs saying, it is abundantly clear to any avant-garde physiotherapist who has thought *carefully* enough about the question of pedagogy. If you haven't read the significant German research on avant-garde pedagogy for physiotherapists then that's not my fucking problem. Drive around with the windows rolled down screaming 'Fuck Plato' at every philosopher.

Two Texts

RONA LORIMER

I

The girl goes to the interview because she is unemployed. This is a situation she is finding so far, favourable, since there's a social movement raging outside, and so far it has not really been necessary to eat for several days. The night her parents left she had a severe case of food poisoning, threw up for four hours, and didn't sleep much. The next day in burning sunshine, she went to the demonstration, alone, and witnessed 16 year old mostly French-Algerian high school boys being badly beaten by the police. She had eye drops in her bag and was able to help one of them.

The boys are students who have been blocked by police because they wanted to go to Bergson, a school where one of their friends had been badly beaten and hospitalised by police. The kettle attracts a lot of other protesters, who wait until the boys, about 200 in total, are freed. Everyone chants about hating the police. Press and teenagers watch from the windows above the nearby café. Two girls dance audaciously in the top window, using their bodies as a sexy dismissal of state power. They throw water bottles into the crowd for the tear gas, and to drink. It is a hot day. No one will leave until all are set free. When they are set free, the police run, teenagers fall, others run back to pick them up. Every cop is highly militarised. Whilst the kettle is held, a drone is spotted in the sky over the canal.

Later on the march, which is boring because it is lined by cops, the girl finds friends to walk with, and gets severely teargassed and peppersprayed. It's the worst she's ever had on account of five bombs going off simultaneously. Her eyes sting, she can neither breathe nor walk. A boy who, when she met him, claimed to have burnt down a meat factory in Germany years before, leads her out of the crowd, holding her hand and instructing her to hold on to him. Several of his friends cover her face with a white milky substance. She goes home feeling nauseous and exhilarated.

Later that night, she returns to the square. It is raining, but everyone is determined. The president announces on television, which is broadcast in the square, that he will not repeal the law. No-one seems too bothered, and no-one she speaks to seems surprised either. At some point people begin to circle the main statue, to gather a crowd. There are whispers among them that they will go to the president's house. Everyone is happy with this idea. The circling O shaped crowd becomes a Q shape as one tail diverts and everyone follows. They pass a café where fascists have sheltered the week before and take a side street. One protester is injured by a police grenade. The noise is hard to describe, but it is so full and harmonious: a siren, on a megaphone, wails periodically, people shout *toutes les mondes deteste la police*, and the sound of metal and wood against glass chimes rhythmically. It is a harmony. Noone seems angry, only determined and quite happy. And everyone knows what to do.

There are many people, masked and unmasked, but the girl gets the sense that here, unlike in her home country, there is an unconditional solidarity between the people

smashing glass and the people doing nothing. Certainly, within the crowd, people cooperate, they tell each other when the police are coming, the communication is good. The protesters are pretty confident of being able to spot undercover, and therefore they trust the rest of the crowd. The crowd moves fast, with some urgency, it wants to do as much damage before the police catch up. The post office is illuminated yellow whilst pink flares line the sky. The mood is really diabolical, but not frightening. The protesters are inviting darkness, like ritual. They reach the bridge of the canal. The girl finds friends who she was afraid of losing.

Still no cops in sight. The protest crosses the bridge, and continues down the canal. People eating in tastefully lit, hipster cafes along the canal look shocked and horrified. A waitress comes out and retrieves a white mesh chair that a protester has picked up, in order to do as much damage as possible. She crosses the crowd calmly, picks the chair up and carries it upside down on her head back to the café. The girl muses once more on the subject of gentrification and riots, but rather loses that thread. The girl has lost the friends again, is looking for them, her friend is worried, and says she will leave if the girl doesn't pay more attention. They pass a supermarket, which is looted. It is hard to work out what is being smashed as it's so much. Only people who are masked are doing the looting. The rest protect them, that's the sense the girl gets of the crowd.

The crowd chant the name of the place they want to go, they cross, urgently to the right and hurl down a quiet residential street with wheely bins. A man and his daughter are walking toward them, completely calmly. They know the riot is not coming for them. A 60 year old woman is leaning out of her window, pretty annoyed. The protesters over turn wheelybins, which is a technique the girl has seen the police use, to maximise noise. Now they are turning left and the crowd starts to yell news of police coming. Still the communication is good. Although the riot sees several lighted police trucks, sirens on, wailing, pass the end of the street they are on, the riot seem to have gone unnoticed by them. Again the place they want to reach is screamed at top volume, and everyone echoes enthusiastically.

The girl realises they are walking down a street where she once went to a poetry reading at someone's house. The host was very aristocratic, wore plum coloured velvet trousers, got too drunk and tried to force them to read poems from his personal library. Instead they misbehaved, read what they wanted, and he became excited and showed them pictures of people who had perished in a terrorist attack and whom he wanted to raise money for, screaming that he, as an aristocrat, detested the *normale*. Also on this street is the *pole l'emploi*, which is naturally whacked and smashed at. People drag wheely bins and bits of corrugated hoarding into the street to make barricades in case the police come this way. They are nearly on one of the big boulevards. A man looks on from his ground floor window, supportive but perhaps apprehensive. The crowd, sirens wailing, red smoke flares, people masked and unmasked, pass a café, where the people sitting outside are unmoved. On the boulevard they resume chanting that all the world hates the police, smash billboards and bus stops. The protest may have the energy of the widely cancelled cop21 or of the antiglobo protests, in that they target advertising, but the girl gets the feeling that this is just because it's behind glass. Damage to private property, or state property, has seemed to be rather more expressive of an understanding of the limits of representative politics, and of a general hatred of the police. Recycling bins are ripped

from their foundations, so that people can gather the bottles for ammunition. They spill out like glitter.

The riot continues up into the bourgeois district of the *Buttes Chaumont*, and either a Jaguar shop or Jaguar cars are vandalised. Suddenly: fear in the crowd as they report that the undercover cops have caught up. They are violent unlike the undercover cops in her home country, who are just for surveillance and are rarely armed. A medic is screamed for.

They are running. She is speaking to a boy, in English. Dressed like a bourgeois, he is smoking calmly whilst participating in the riot. Participating is just *being* there, as an expression of affirmation, protecting the people who are doing things by your presence, helping with the passing of information. They turn left along the ornamental park, people turn over wheely bins and make a burning barricade. A lonely journalist stops in the middle of the street, trying to take a photograph. It's about to ebb out, the cops are ahead, they run, run back, warn everyone *c'est les flics!*. They decide to be done, wait, drawn into a café. Minutes later the robocops arrive, grunting like warthogs picking over a carcass. They pick up some of the recycling, superciliously put it in a bag, and give it to the café owner, passing the conspicuous youth around the door. But the café owner is on the side of the riot, he comes out and brings everyone a glass of water to make them look like customers.

The next night she goes back to the square, and the next, and on the third night she goes, just to drink some beers with a friend. Conclusively nothing happens for several hours, some friends join them, and as they are going to take the last metro, a small standoff starts on the edge of the square. Somebody has pulled more wheelybins to become barricades, they are set on fire, and bottles are thrown. Unfortunately some of the kids are drunk, they are not wearing masks. There seems to have been a failure to connect the younger kids with the young militants. The police create an illusion of freedom by standing far down the square, and merely dispersing the crowd using tear gas. Because of the obscurity of the gas, perhaps, or the drunkenness of the participants, kids are walking around carrying bottles. Wishing to leave, wishing to stay, wishing to watch the small fire, and the bottles piling up, the girls walk forward, retreat, walk forward, retreat, clutching their scarves to their faces, trying not to open their mouths or close their eyes. In the haze of the smoke all they can hear is *bonjour jolie bonjour mon amour bonjour mademoiselles j'ai envi de toi* which is frustrating as they attempt to warn people, mainly young men, to wear masks, not touch their eyes, and use the remaining eyedrops to help people.

The square is filling up with gas, as two or three missiles are fired at once, out of some kind of police cannon, every few minutes. The gas has an illuminated tail which makes a wiggly arc in the sky, before coming down. It is hard to predict where it will fall, but when it does you must run. This goes on for at least an hour, the air is thick with smoke. They retreat to an edge of the square, both of them feeling extremely nauseous. One girl is throwing up. On the edge of the square some kind of group is playing *Moaning* by Charlie Mingus on instruments.

Three streets back from the square there is still gas. Everyone is drunk. It is a mess. One of the girls has left her bike in the square. Walking along in the thick air they once again find creeps, preying on young girls. The men follow them, kiss them, and

finally back off. *C'est le mode parisien* the younger girls explain. Rounding back into the square again they realise they cannot cross it. The gas is still coming and it is too strong. The girl feels her skin, dry. Walking back, they find people pulling the hoarding off a construction site to build a barricade. Suspiciously no cops, who have stayed in their position. Several streets back from the canal, the gas is just as thick, they begin to not see, not breathe. Just getting to the next point is important, and none of it feels safe. They are not sure how much of the crowd is cops, somehow it has transformed like this now that each man who passes them tries to hit on them. Or, this feels like being invisible, which in this case is good. The BAC, violent undercover cops, arrive but in a two it is impossible to warn the rest since they would identify themselves. After some altercation over whether to go back, they try to help people outside a macdonalds whose eyes are red and wet.

Again, they attempt to reach the square. It seems to the girl that the square has become something she is always trying to reach or to not go to. Whichever one she picks, the opposite wins. As they are turning into the square, going past a line of cops and BAC, a man begins to follow them. He seems a little creepy and is dressed like a civilian. He has too many questions to ask them about what's going on and tries to follow them. Just as they are walking into one street, they abruptly turn. One girl goes to get the bike, because the other is too sick for the gas. But when she comes back with it, there is another creep, asking too much information about what's been going on. They walk quickly down the road, finding that the first man has begun to follow them again.

The next few days they take it easy, go to the hammam and try to get the gas out of their skin and hair. It's not so easy, and neither of them can sleep for more than 5 hours over the next few days. This is not helped by the fact that the first girl finds it impossible to stay away from the square. Each day she goes, sees who's there and goes away again, but nothing happens. One day while she is staying away she sees a huge dead fish in the canal, and the next day another one, which a friend mistakes for a baguette. The girl begins to realise that because of the language barrier, there's a lot she doesn't understand about what is being discussed, and about how wide-reaching the movement is or isn't. For her, the mix of the crowd during the first riot convinced her that the movement was across all classes. This was (romantically) confirmed for her when she saw rubbish-bin-men passing the square and honking their horns, and by the fact that each wonderful high school blockade happened on the same day as the union strike. But now this is something she must rethink and many people who know better tell her it is not so, and the movement is not big enough, besides the holidays are coming up and who knows what will happen then.

When she has had enough of teargas for a while she attends an interview for a job she has found on craigslist. She finds the advert in a reverie, clicking through. The girl is used to all the adverts on craigslist, which are usually for mediocre sex work, and usually lead nowhere. One of them she always clicks on hoping that the asker will have changed his sexual preference, it reads 'pay you to kick me in the groin'. Another reads 'life model for birthday boy' and explains that a one hour drawing session will end in the life model surprisingly having sex with the man whose birthday it is, in front of all his friends. She finds one she thinks is legit enough called 'cherche modele femenin', and thinks this will be a good way to pick up cash and still attend the nightly protests. She is not so keen when she rings up the man, he is

brusque and asks her particular questions, to do with whether she is pretty and what her origins are.

She and a friend go to the man's studio for the interview unsure of what they will find. It seems likely that the work will be sex work and this seems even more likely given that they have been talking about sex work, between themselves all afternoon. The friend is a PA to an erotic masseuse.

Having found some employment, and with that starting the following day, the girl goes to the protest as she is underemployed and has the time to do so. She meets another girl and two boys, and they wait nervously on the edges of the socialist rally, feeling underprepared. They can see people dressed inconspicuously, as well as union men, and undercover cops. It is hard to tell the difference, since the undercover cops are wearing *CNT* badges. This is definitely illegal, since undercovers must never be exactly *disguised* but must in fact swiftly don an orange band before they beat you up. Still the march starts, stops, starts, stops.

Life Modelling

I was only clicking through craigslist in a reverie because, C had been talking about her work as *secrétaire* to an erotic masseuse, which she had found through craigslist. For her work, C answers the phone in French, pretending to be the masseuse, puts on a small, mousy voice meant to be sexy, and describes the services offered. Actually, C's voice is much sexier and deeper than the voice she summons for these calls, she has saved that for herself. *La massage, corps a corps, plutot differentes... l'huile japonais... avec ma ventre*. When the men call Camila always says *Alors, la massage... corps a corps*, and at the end says *et voila*.

Her boss does not speak French, not at all. But what happens when they arrive and, she, having said, on the phone, *Oui J'arrive*, suddenly doesn't speak French anymore? Camila laughs 'I don't know!'. The scheme is just as gimcrack as other schemes friends have participated in whilst working as assistants to people being paid more than they are. 'People just go cuckoo when they have an assistant', Anna says the next morning, as we sit in front of the scalding hot canal. We draw together our experiences, which are all *cuckoo*, respectively. We have all become inveigled into complicated telephone arrangements for the purpose of inhabiting different identities on behalf of another woman. When our someone cannot do something,¹ they hire us, and we become them.

This reminds me of the winner of Crufts, or of some other dog competition, who I

¹ or *won't*

saw on a YouTube video the week before. The stellar dog was height-shy, so another one was brought in for the tightrope section. This is altogether against the rules of the game, and so was set up elaborately. The trainer, impersonating a cop, led the dog to a jail. The dog convict entered, switched with the other similar looking dog, behind the plasterboard wall of the set, and then the stunt double escaped the jail on a tightrope – a telephone line, just outside. Really, it is fitting, that the dog convicts should use their similitude in the eyes of the law to trick the cop so that one can go free. But who would like to look like a cop?

This is like being a PA, when the faults or wants of your employer are transposed on to your body to become skills that you must possess. What they lack, you must become. Or, to put it another way, the way people with money can construct a new body made of bits of other people's bodies: a new lawyer-mother body with the appendage of nanny, cleaner, perambulator. In the case of my old boss, she didn't know how to write sexy text messages to seduce someone she'd only met once or twice. My hands, appendages to hers, carefully built the first, whatsapp stages of romance. I was never allowed to send the messages myself, and instead always texted them to her so that she could copy and paste them into a new message, authored by her. After a while I felt I was her, unable to live my own words.

It's the stuff of fairy tales too, since I never slept with the men I seduced, like in *The Little Mermaid* where Ariel trades her voice for a chance to see her prince. Or considering it differently, Ursula, who has magic, seduces the prince with little Ariel's lung-song, extracted and made solid and valuable. People were outraged by the suggestion that Rihanna might not write her own text messages, or have decided to support Germany in the world cup all by herself in 2014, but this is the building and congealing of a big person.

Camila's work is really like this too, as she must answer the phone all week to make appointments for the masseuse, in French, and using a sexy voice. The men often chance asking for penetrative sex, to come at the end of the massage, and when Camila refuses, sometimes they hang up. So some of the appointments are dead ends. This was no good at first since the masseuse wanted to pay Camila on a kind of commission, according to how much she worked. The masseuse is flaky and likes to go and party, go for cocktails with her inlaws, get her eyebrows tattooed on in two sharp points, or generally not turn up to appointments, which are held at an apartment she shares with two other women who also work. The men never pressure the masseuse once they are there, they nearly never grovel for penetrative sex, so Camila, as the assistant, absorbs most of this pushiness. However, she is subtly giving these men lessons in political lesbian sex, she says in answer to their questions, that sex ought not to be thought of as only penetrative, and that if they want they can pay extra to be fucked in the ass with a dildo. The sessions are €300, and the masseuse should probably stop cancelling so as to build up a client base of men who are not so transient. Clients are mostly professional, working in fashion or communications, and have a lot of money, although once a student called and asked for a discount.

It's possible that C must answer the phone to give the illusion that the masseuse is alone before each session, as she is really in the apartment between certain hours, or is supposed to be. Often, the masseuse changes her mind and C must come up with reasons.

So C was in the toilet peeing, and I found this advert. After deliberating over it, I called, and found a brusque and disconcerting voice on the other end of the phone. The advert was written in both French and English, and so I asked if we could conduct an interview in English.

‘Non!’ he barked, as though this was *absurd*. Je parle pas Anglais. I speak only a little bit of English’ he added, slowly. ‘On a parle francais’.

‘Ok d’accord, pas de probleme monsieur, mais, je parle pas tres bien le francais. Je suis une fille anglaise, de Londres’

‘Une fille ANGLAISE! ton prenom?’

‘Ah – Rona. C’est *r – o – n – a*, pas *renaud*’ (fox)

‘Pas le renaud!’

‘oui’

‘tu est jolie?’

‘ah –‘

‘tu est jolie ou pas’

‘ba.... oui j’espere monsieur’

‘donc? tu visiter c’est soir?’

‘uh –‘

‘tu visiter c’est soir? je suis ici jusqu a dix heure. DIX HEURE’

Was it possible to visit tomorrow, in daylight? Certainly not, because this man, who would tell me nothing about the job, wants me to visit now. It is already seven o clock. But I decide to go. He asks me where I live and I lie, a fear of creeps places me a couple of metro stations from where I actually am. In a brusque rush he gives the address, spelling, code, *deuxieme porte*. But I am not sure if I want to go yet and so have not written it down and have to ask for it again. Again he roars in French, just ask ! don’t be afraid ! you should have told me before ! he screams down the line. We repeat the address, he is horrifically jovial. I feel as though I can’t quite be bothered to go there without knowing the pay, the hours, what the job involves. But it seems impossible to get any of this from him. Instead, trying to get at least some information, not wanting to go there empty handed, say hurriedly

‘Et, comment vous-appelle?’

‘C’est un peu complique parceque je suis pas francais. je suis czec. Hapcha! *H a p c h a*. Et *toi* ton origines?’

So, the classic question, which is really an answer, telling us this man is a little bit fascist.

‘Je suis Anglaise’.

‘et tu fait quoi ?’

‘je suis une etudiante’

‘bon a toute a l’heure’

So, this man is a fascist, and with *toutes les mondes* fighting outside, gathering in the squares, we still go to Bastille, because it is next to Republique on the orange line 5. Before leaving I get dressed, deliberating over a kind of too-fluffybunnyish jumper, levis, doctor martens, thinking about pay, that it would probably be his house. In my head a vignette of a man peering through a small door, a dutch painting, a Czech painter. Tiled floors, green paint. C thought it best to try to charge a bit more than I think of, to be alone and naked in this man’s house, I say €20, C says, *no no, let him suggest something, if he lives in Bastille he’s very rich, leave the space open so that he can offer more.*

At Bastille, cold, ice cream skies, the street, and the heavy medieval door. And suddenly everything was too quick as we went up steps, under construction, and found an open door and several locked doors, I reached for my notebook to check, and there was this huge old fat seal of a man in a peach tshirt, peering through the crack, nearly catching us by the ankles as we passed. *Who are you looking for?* he asked gruffly in French. And camila replied ‘an artist, a painter?’ appealing to me for his name. ‘Hapcha’? I try to remember. ‘*Et le nom?*’ ‘Hapcha’. ‘*et comment vous appeles?*’. That was obviously what he’d meant: *your name. Come in then*, grumpily. So we stepped in, nearly tripping over a builder, who had the front half of his body inside a small, red tiled bathroom, and the lower half of it into the small ante chamber we now found ourselves in. He was fiddling with a small sink. He was a plumber, not a builder. The door was decorated with an Araki poster, a mons pubis with a strong merkin. *Pas ferme!* screams the man, who is presumably the artist. He has a walking stick and seems to need to do something with the builder. In front of him was a table, with a large telephone directory on it, in which, I could see, he had written my name and some other girls.

Comment tu t’apelle?

he asked me again.

Rona. He didn’t seem to understand so I pointed again to the name in the book.

Et oui? he said. He seemed to be surprised that I was there, as if asking me to present myself.

I said

oui?

He irritably bustled us through to the studio, the walls of which were filled with amateur erotic paintings, in a style after Lucien Freud. Three girls were painting on easels that aimed toward a wall, from printouts of paintings. When we had stood there for one second he bustled me again through into the ante room, demanding that I take off my coat. Suddenly worried I'd have to sacrifice the evening, I asked

vous donné les leçons ici?

Ba, oui

c'est pour aujourd'hui monsieur?

NON! he barked. the barking seal. *Just take off your coat because it's hot.*

Once I had done so and looked back and Camila, leaning in to her chair uncomfortably in the studio, in her white angora jumper, cropped black hair, sitting low into the chair, gamine, shrinking, as if the man's strange behaviour was also affecting her, and as I turned back found him, looking down at my breasts and made a look, as if of approval.

Oui? he said sarcastically. *Donc??*

It's you, right? gesturing at camila as if it couldn't possibly be someone who was Mexican. *It has to be you, right?* he said again, gesturing at my face. He marched me into the studio and then demanded that I come back into the ante-chamber with the plumber. In the confusion, I couldn't quite see anything, only one man working, an old ogre overseeing the works. He didn't ask Camila to take off her coat. I rolled my eyes at her, decided that the man was playing a game and that I wasn't going to play. Pointing at the book, he asked me my name again, *which one are you*. Then, looking at my breasts, again, said simply *bon*. So far so good. I began to speak, my name, he interrupted me again

go in the other room! see what you think!

Before I had the chance to move, he pointed again at the large directory and said

what do you think? Look at these!

He was holding two erotic black and white photographs and a drawing, in 2b, of a woman standing as if looking out over the helm of a ship, about to jump. The shading is such to make her look both full and hairy like a guinea pig. It is like a 16 year old's drawing, too faithful, too literal, without the draftmanship to carry its faithfulness it ends up again as dilettante-ish, swerving into earnestness, a cartoonish desperation to draw a human. The photographs are of a woman, older than me. They are tasteful, or, just tacky. In one, a man's head is somewhere nesting on her belly, in its gloom. Sad sea-creatures trapped in the aftermath of Man Ray. *Oh no, not photographs.* I think.

‘Donc? Je t’ecoute!’ *So? I am listening!*

He is not listening.

He barks again. But before I can answer he dismisses me from the antechamber up the small steps into the studio, and begins taking to his supine builder or plumber once again. I am on an elastic, and will be propelled back at any minute, called to open my mouth, called to close it.

The studio, which I hadn’t quite looked at before, has large windows, wooden floors, and smells of linseed oil and oil paint. Three girls are working assiduously on some easels, they are wearing similar clothes to each other: grey t-shirts, black or blue jeans. They all have brown hair. They all look the same. I wonder if these girls are what the man searches for in his models. None of them wear makeup. The large paintings on the walls are of, for instance, a man, lying on his back, his neck reaching out toward the viewer. He has a small, erect penis. The background of the painting is primary blue, and his body is painted in pseudo-Freudish strokes: mottled, marred shades, blue, black, white. Like the paintings of sixth form colleges in the UK which have received a special art prize to cover their special measures everything else. Such tortured bodies, mangled by these strokes. The ones on the adjacent wall are nearly identical but they are in brown, reddish tones. Backs – muscular and grotesque.

The paintings have had too much, long, careful attention given them. Too many individual brushstrokes in three colours. The problem with the paintings is that colour has been substituted for tone, and this exchange works in both directions: there’s no colour in the paintings, they work on a monochrome, the tones of which are represented in colours. This means there is no real light or dark, either. There is too much black. All of it like mixing ash with white oil. Some smaller paintings along the windowsill including one of a woman with red hair bravely use colour as well. Green in the background, because that is what must be contrasted with red hair.

Perhaps the girls are his *mademoiselle*–students, but he didn’t really answer me when I asked. The girl closest to where C is sitting is doing a very miserable rendition of Schiele’s prostitute. The paper is A4, wrinkling under peach, green and yellow watercolour. The girl at the front, who seems to be some kind of leader, paints a man, on his side. Again the same technique, a block colour background whose colours bleed into the body, is used. Behind the easels, there is a scratchy yellow blanket cast lumpily over a manger-like bed. I expect that’s where I would lie, not quite one of the women in the room.

‘What does he say?’ asks Camila

‘He showed me some photographs and a drawing. I’m happy to sit for drawings.’

‘you’d be worried?’

‘Yes.’

‘Wait, but you’re in a book for Vogue! I don’t get it’

'I don't know, he's just creepy' I whisper. I know I have been instructed to look around the studio but have already grown bored of it. It's just a room, after all, and it's not as though I am impressed, I have painted before, after all. So, sitting on one of the artist's chairs, I peer at the records. My eye falling on some kind of Vivaldi compilation titled something like 'accompanying romance' or 'accompanying love-making', I realise that the same love-making sound track is filling the room. I couldn't paint to music, but then, he can't really paint anyway, so never mind. My thoughts are still on the girls, who are all French, all white, all brunette, and all wearing, incidentally, the same clothes, his interns, or *stagaires*? We sit on the chairs, bored. He is arguing with the plumber over fifty euros.

'You'd probably only end up in some gallery in Paris, but yeah, just say you want to sit for drawings' says C coolly. He comes back in barks at me again, gesturing to the whole studio,

'donc?' *SO?*

I'm beginning to feel really hopeless, at a loss, like I'm hearing the sound of two rusty bits of metal rubbing together ahead of a train crash.

He asks a question, not understanding it, I stand up obediently, my pink jumper in my hand. He yells again before I have time to work out what has been said. I sit down.

Alors! On a mange? Tu veux manger? 'time to eat! you want to eat?'. The girls silently begin to clean their brushes, clear a space to eat. He asks the question again, looking at me as if I am an idiot. I stand up again.

'He asks if you want to eat with him' prompts C, kindly, just as I am beginning to understand what he's asking. *Oh, non, merci beaucoup, on va manger pizza a plus tard.*

He makes a gesture as if this is completely crazy. I wonder what they will eat. By this time, I feel everything he does as so absurd, so hostile, so thoroughly designed to show me that I am not important to him. He has made me come all the way here, has no time to see me, wants me to perform, in French, even though I can't very well, and would rather interrupt any attempt I do make. I realise the interview will be conducted during their dinner. And he makes a big show of looking at his watch, saying something along the lines of *we've been working so hard, it's 9 o'clock for gods sake, we must eat.* Or something, I don't quite catch it. So he sort of clicks his fingers and one of the *mademoiselles* goes to fix it. He sits down on a chair. *So*, he says in French, *I am listening, speak.* I don't want to say anything to him so I say

J'ai vu votre annonce au craigslist et je vous appelle deja. I smile, totally irritated by him.

It probably sounds stupid. So he says

Donc, je t'ecoute. Yes, I am listening. He gestures to the room as if the whole room is listening to me, as I continue to say nothing of interest. The way that he keeps demanding that I speak and then cutting me off when I do, finally begin, is a way of

ensuring that I will never speak. It is also is a test, both for now, and for later. I must pitch to him, that's for now, he must break me into pieces to test my character, that's for later. Either I will freak out, in which case I am too spirited, or I will stick it through, in which case I not only have the strength of character necessary for sticking with such a tyrant. This is a small sexual power played with language. The girls return and he is still playing this particular part of the game, talking to me, then talking immediately to Camila as I start to respond. He asks – it is absurd –

Which one of you is it again?

then says

What's your name again?

All of this to make me feel small. So I look at him really sarcastically, taking him on. But just as I build up the strength to take this bull by the horns, we are suddenly not alone and one of the girls, who I must now be polite to, asks if I don't mind the smell. As an English girl. No, I'm fine thankyou , I respond in French.

Oh ! T'es pas francaise en fait! As if she hasn't witnessed the pantomime.

Non, et je ne parle pas bien francais, en fait, je parle pas tres bien

But somehow before I have got it all out, the girl has lost interest and is talking to Camila instead, keen to find someone who speaks better French than I do.

T'es francaise, en fait?

Non, je suis pas francaise. But Camila will not volunteer that she is Mexican, for this obviously racist question.

Just as I am explaining again that I don't mind the smell of the camembert – because dinner is a camembert, two baguettes, a bottle of beer, taramasalata and olive paste just to remind us all that in France we speak French and, Rona, you are not performing well in this interview, even though all the job will require is that you sit still with none of your clothes on, completely silently – just as I am trying to explain that I don't mind, he asks me something again

donc je t'ecoute

the seal man ogre, is becoming progressively more enraged by my muteness and thinks I am an idiot. So the girls titter, and the girl leader, who has pretended to be interested, says to him, would you like a morsel, and passes him a piece of cheese, no bread. The moist cheese is between two fingers. This is a tender joke, to calm his mood, which is anyway absurd. When he asks me the next question I therefore think it's to do with the cheese and answer

non merci

and everyone laughs, camila says agonised – 'no!', and the leader-girl interrupts her,

saying 'no, he asks if you want to model, nude?'

So I explain again that that is indeed why I am here. And Camila says 'shall I translate?', and the man says 'no, on a parle francais'. The sounds and images are indistinct. I haven't eaten all day. The translation would be for me. He turns to me, says

Parle. speak.

This time, I say in English:

*I don't understand --- anything --- and then, getting some courage
Ça c'est une entretien de embauche quoi, c'est pas pour moi a poser les questions,
quoi. c'est pour vous a demander a moi. Moi j'ai rien a dit*

(this is an interview and it's not for me to ask questions, its for you to demand them of me. I have nothing to say to you)

and then regret it, because I wish I could ask how many hours and when – but he's not listening anyway, even though he keeps saying *je t'ecoute*. and he turns to camila and says something and she says 'yes' in French, and it feels like I'm going to the dentist with my mum, feet painfully curling on the chair to register my pain, and I nod enthusiastically, as camila says in French *she already told you she'd done it before*

I nod enthusiastically like a broken doll *oui oui j'ai fait ça deja*

and he begins to gesture at my breasts with two fingers spread as if in cunninglingus, pointing first at his eyes and then at my breasts. Unsure of what to do with his pussy-distanced fingers I look hopelessly at camila, hear the girls, giggling next to me. I guess he is saying he needs to look at me. Someone, not me, another girl, asks if he needs to look at me now.

Pas Maintenant! Not now! he screams, in French, *On a mange!* We are eating! I say, I don't want to do photographs, and he says *OUI?* as if we've been communicating extremely clearly up until this point, as if it's absurd to repeat anything, as if he hasn't been repeating me into desperation. The girls are really laughing now and I feel tears on my eyelids, a sense of heat, more blurriness and indistinct confusion. *Je pas comprix, je parle pas francais* – I start again and the fascist artist dit

Ouaaiiii moi aussi parce que je suis Czech , c'est pas grave, on a parles FRAN-CAIS!
It is a performance to the extent that he says

t'es avec les femmes – PARLE! you're among women so speak!

riding his words against his own marquis de sadeish current. I must pitch my body, which is already here and must be made more than it is by my words I guess. Firm in my feeling that he should be pitching his studio to my body, I look over again at the yellow sacking, the rumpled bed, believing it to be the site of several similar moments, perhaps. The situation is so confusing and theatrical that my heart trembling again, I say fiercely and again

Ça c'est une entretien de embauche quoi, c'est pas pour moi a poser les questions, quoi. c'est pour vous a demander a moi. Moi j'ai rien a dit

And camila chips in on my behalf. It is as if I have stamped on the ogres toe, he begins to roar to the crowd, tossing his head from side to side, saying again either that I must speak, he is listening, he doesn't understand what I'm saying, that we must speak in French since he has, in his life, managed to speak French, despite being Czech. I decide it, too much, look at camila, look down, say

je me casse

I split. Bye. I get up, swiftly, say

on y va?

she, in the periphery of my vision gets up, whilst on the other edge of my eyeline I see him extending his right hand for me to shake. Instead I say

non

get my coat from the antechamber, where the labourer has since departed, saying

what a cunt

and burst into tears

we walk all the way to republique and it strikes me as strange this egomaniac patriot, with camembert, artist's studio, baguettes and all, making the girl *speak French* whilst there are migrant movements, riots around the corner, so many homeless, fish floating dead in the canal from the teargas, and this man, so firm in his kingdom.

Poetry and Self-Defence

DANNY HAYWARD

《最后的墓地》

‘The Last Graveyard’

Even the machine is nodding off
Sealed workshops store diseased iron
Wages concealed behind curtains
Like the love that young workers bury at the bottom of their hearts
With no time for expression, emotion crumbles into dust
They have stomachs forged of iron
Full of thick acid, sulfuric and nitric
Industry captures their tears before they have the chance to fall
Time flows by, their heads lost in fog
Output weighs down their age, pain works overtime day and night
In their lives, dizziness before their time is latent
The jig forces the skin to peel
And while it's at it, plates on a layer of aluminum alloy
Some still endure, while others are taken by illness
I am dozing between them, guarding
The last graveyard of our youth.

This is a poem by the poet Xu Lizhi, who three years after its composition killed himself by jumping from the 17th floor of a shopping mall in Shenzhen to become one member of a small but historically important group. The group was important enough for Steve Jobs to assert that it was statistically insignificant and threatening enough to impel Foxconn to raise employee wages by about twelve percent over a period of four years.² It was also firm enough in its actions, and its constituents were deliberate enough in choosing the method of their death, to generate a sort of brief flicker of recognition even in places where the suffering of wage labourers at the bottom of the global value chain is forever most enthusiastically celebrated, in those parts of the Western business press whose main purpose is to make capitalist exploitation sound fun and interesting. Like most groups that achieve their aims by some kind of collective action, nobody commented on the behaviour of this one by describing it as ‘haunting’ or ‘tragic’ or as being ‘capable of opening a rare window’ onto some new groundswell of bourgeois mouthwash or by asserting mindlessly that its actions had ‘struck a chord’ with ‘the Chinese youth’, in the deeply human and empathetic vocabulary of an A&R

² Kathrin Hille, ‘Foxconn to Raise Salaries 20% after Suicides’, *The Financial Times*, 28 May 2010, at: <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/5e1ee750-6a05-11df-a978-00144feab49a.html#axzz3zrvdQLmN>>. For some information about how the suicides galvanised other workers to participate in less catastrophically self-destructive forms of struggle, see the article by the *Bloomberg* journalist Dexter Roberts, ‘The Rise of a Chinese Worker’s Movement’, reprinted on the *China Labor Bulletin* website at: <<http://www.clb.org.hk/en/content/additional-reports-labour-unrest>>. More general first-person reports on the recent history of Chinese factory labour can be found here: <<http://www.gongchao.org/en/factory-stories>>.

rep meditating on the prospects of a future sales commission.³ Nobody would have said this, nobody would have even conceived of such a response, because it was immediately obvious to anybody with eyes that the significance of the spate of Foxconn jumping suicides as a *collective action* was a catastrophic and peremptory refusal of the conditions in which proletarian lives are bought up for almost nothing and then made to bend into any shape or to take on any significance that their owners think is profitable or touching or sad and funny at the same time.

None of these things were said about the group to which Xu Lizhi now unalterably belongs, but all of them were said about the poetry that Xu Lizhi wrote and which was translated and circulated in the months after his death. As soon as the first English-language translations of his poems were stolen, uncredited, from the communist labour activists who first produced them, to be re-posted to the Bloomberg website, a pernicious tendency grew up in the vocabulary of critical description.⁴ For the journalist writing for the *Wall Street Journal*, Xu Lizhi was ‘a 24-year-old with literary aspirations’. From this viewpoint, Xu Lizhi’s poems were not ‘tragic’ because they scream out for some responsive insight into the duration or the intensity of a personal struggle against hostile social conditions, but instead because individually they are *irrelevant*, an eyesore in the vicinity of poetry as such, the trail of empty packaging and beer cans that get scattered about indecorously in the entrance to a Site of Great Historical Interest.⁵ Trained journalists understand that the best thing that can be done with work like this is to hold one’s nose and look the other way, in the hope that someone might come along and sweep it away from the ‘aspiration’ whose attractiveness to Western tourists it vitiates; or else that if it absolutely must be looked at then it should be glanced at hastily, compassionated and then immediately forgotten. Their choice of descriptive phraseology shows that they know instinctively that this is what they are doing

³ In order of appearance: Ishaan Tharoor, ‘The Haunting Poetry of a Chinese Factory Worker who Committed Suicide’, *The Washington Post*, 12 November 2014, at: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/11/12/the-haunting-poetry-of-a-chinese-factory-worker-who-committed-suicide/>>; Joshua Barrie, ‘Read the Heartbreaking Poems of a Man Who Committed Suicide After [sic] Working in a Foxconn Factory’, *Business Insider UK*, at: <http://uk.businessinsider.com/foxconn-factory-workers-suicide-poems-2014-11>>; Eva Dou, ‘After Suicide, Foxconn Worker’s Poems Strike a Chord [sic]’, *Wall Street Journal*, 7 November 2014, at: <<http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/11/07/after-suicide-foxconn-workers-poems-strike-a-chord/>>.

⁴ The original article and translations were by the group Nao. All of the materials can be found here: <<https://libcom.org/blog/xulizhi-foxconn-suicide-poetry>>. Everything in this article however wayward is nevertheless stated in a spirit of profound gratitude to Nao for undertaking the work of translating these poems and for presenting them as they deserved to be presented.

⁵ Put from the perspective of its worst readers, the same point can be made differently. Poetry *must* be treated like this, as if it were the raw material for its own concept, and the intense and sustained labour of its human realisation must be disregarded, because without this conceit it cannot be imagined as the symmetrically satisfying opposite of a concept of industrial labour. Working-class poets must be fobbed off with a vague desire for the ‘idea’ of poetry and their actual accomplishments must be ignored, because otherwise their fate cannot be treated as if it were inevitable from the outset. The confrontation with actual poetry peremptorily disables this whole operation of moral response, since almost by definition actual poetry has nothing to do with predestination or with the sad acknowledgement of the necessary cruelty of whatever happens to be in the interests of the ruling classes in major Chinese export markets.

and that their indifference is in need of some justification, since the assertion that the poetry itself never does anything more than ‘open a window’ onto or ‘offer a peek’ at the circumstances that it contests is self-evidently designed to insinuate that there *isn’t all that much to be seen*.⁶ *There’s nothing to see here*. This is the anxious connotation with which those who assert ownership over the ‘idea’ of poetry affirm their relationship to the everyday policing operations that are used to discipline the people who are shut out from it, on the wrong side of its window of opportunity.

Xu Lizhi’s writing itself is of course grotesquely parodied by this treatment and yet it seems defenceless in the face of it. Can it be defended? In the following short essay I will argue that it can be, and that, in spite of the liberties that bourgeois journalists take with it, it can be defended principally because Xu Lizhi’s poetry is itself an expressively defensive kind of writing. I also think that the character of its defensiveness, and the specific object that it chooses to defend, can tell us something useful about the history of capitalist violence and its present hypertrophic extremities. Xu Lizhi’s poetry may seem ‘tragic’ to those for whom it suffers the conventionally tragic ‘fatal flaw’ of being nothing but a vain striving towards an idea of poetry that it in fact could never attain to, as, in another world, it might have done, had only some philanthropic grant provider singled out its author and vomited in his direction a discriminating stipend; but my argument here is that the work belongs to another genre that is less recognised by institutional funding bodies and the knuckleheaded lamenters of whatever might have been but now isn’t. This is the genre of collective self-defence. In the our present atmosphere of generalised disempowerment and habitual self-abnegation this may not seem like a very plausible category for the description of poetry, especially since (according to the usual exclusionary logic) the phrase is ‘really’ used to describe self-organised food kitchens or rubbish collection or arms training. But Xu Lizhi’s writing is itself the most lucid and exhaustingly definitive proof of the bankruptcy of that logic and of the self-attacking guilt that gives rise to it. It is clearly a very fundamental attempt to hold the self together by giving voice to some of the tendencies that threaten to tear it apart; and the tone of the poetry is inseparable from its author’s fundamental, desperate need for *expressive* control over the most basic dimensions of the situation that he was forced to confront. Defensive poetry is primarily defined by this characteristic, of exercising, and of working implacably to heighten, our *expressive* control over basic or fundamental experiences of capitalist violence; and also by the fact that it recognises that this exercise of expressive control is a real and urgent collective and psychological need. Other bodies of work besides Xu Lizhi’s can be used to show this; Xu Lizhi is in this respect only a singular and unforgettable case.

What defensiveness in language does *not* primarily involve is the prevention of misunderstanding. This is a capacity that now exists if anywhere only in the vegetable aisle in the posterior section of the superior temporal gyrus of Donald Trump. Defensiveness is not only this. It is also and more importantly a volatile and generous intuition of relative value. It begins in a basic recognition that something that is *everything* to you or to the people about whom you care is emphatically and unalterably *nothing* in the eyes of those who have control over the conditions in which you live. It is an immediate and bodily recognition of the insane violence of this historical relativity, which becomes more intense with every year in which the social distribution of produced wealth becomes more and more indescribably polarised. It is what makes a writer like Xu Lizhi say of his own expressive convictions that ‘Flowing through my veins, finally reaching the tip of my pen/ Taking root in the paper/ These words

⁶ For ‘offer a peek’, see Bendon Hong, ‘The Eerie Poetry of Chinese Suicide Victims [sic]’, *Vice Online*, 14 November 2014, at: <https://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/death-poems-are-a-thing-in-china-right-now>.

can be read only by the hearts of migrant workers'. In other words, it is not an attempt to compel those who rule over you to share your feelings but an attempt to induce in yourself a greater and fiercer love for whatever it is whose value is capable of being reduced in *their* eyes to virtually nothing, so as to make of that reduction a still more maddeningly detestable and ridiculous emblem of the established and accepted cruelty of ordinary social life. It is a perverse and reactive attitude, bristling with a pathological obstinacy, seething in a feedback loop of self-harm and misrecognition. It is inseparable from love for what which is actually dominated, hurt or broken, and at one of its extremes it can easily tip back into love for brokenness in and for itself. For the properly defensive writer, which is to say, for the writer who is habitually and attitudinally defensive, it is not only the case that what is everything *for us* is capable of becoming in the eyes of our enemy absolutely nothing, but nothing can be anything except that which is liable at any moment to be reduced once again to nothing at all.

Defensive poetry has besides this two primary attributes or tendencies. The first of these has to do with magnification. Poetry springs from an intuition of the insane violence of relativity, but it does not follow from this fact that it is in any sense 'relativist' or even yet (in the forward-looking manner of the *Wall Street Journal*) that it has relativist 'aspirations'. It is not remotely relativist; it is a furious and bloody-minded response to the fact that what it values *absolutely* is even capable of being relativised. *Everything* and *nothing* become for the defensive poet like two differently coloured floodlights that can be switched on and off alternately. Everything is made to appear alternately under their illumination, to light up alternately under these two evaluative headings; the rhythm of the transformation sets the tempo for the protest it gives rise to, crashing away in the chest like a Bloomberg equities monitor on the blink during a stock market plummet. In Xu Lizhi's 'The Last Graveyard', 'The jig forces the skin to peel,/ And while it's at it, plates on a layer of aluminum alloy'. In the first line, my suffering is everything. In the second, it is nothing. Everything I am becomes greater under the light in which I necessarily appear as nothing at all, as the most immediately replaceable among an infinity of more valuable production factors, put to work until my skin blisters and my body becomes unsuitable for the part operation that it was employed to perform. It becomes inexorably greater and not less under this light because under it the possibility that everything I have and am and everything that I hope for will be brutally taken from me is blown up and distorted until finally it comes to look like all of my horizons pressing in simultaneously on whatever it is that I am and unstoppably squashing it, densifying it, jamming it more and more relentlessly into just *this* moment of living expression cut off from the whole life in which we would never have to place on it demands that it could never hope to meet.

The second primary attribute of defensive poetry is that it is pre-emptive. Defensive poetry *knows* that it cannot have the whole life that it immoderately wishes for, that its words have been ground away before they fall out onto the page, that its protest will never be violent enough to prevent those who it detests from painting it as a mere unfulfilled aspiration. It wishes to empower its readers by confronting *pre-emptively* the violation that it realistically foresees for itself, by seeing more deeply and compassionately into its own brokenness and limitations and the constraints that are placed on its real and positive accomplishments than could any representative of the class who profit from these limitations and who write obituaries in which they call them a 'tragedy'. 'Most of us know', wrote Baraka in his poem 'Das Kapital', that 'there's a maniac loose. Our lives a jumble of frustrations/ and unfilled/ capacities'.⁷ The knowledge is nervous and overwhelming, belated and exhausted, docile and sick and impassive; it is itself an excess capacity, easy to write

⁷ Amiri Baraka, 'Das Kapital', in *Transbluesency: Selected Poems 1961–1995*, edited by Paul Vangelisti (New York: Marcilio Publishers, 1995), p. 153.

down into empty aspiration, into negativity pure and simple, easy to shrug off as ‘unfulfilled potential’ in a marketplace that couldn’t possibly make room for anyone who isn’t already full of shit. It is unprofitable because presently unrealisable, empty and yet impossible to expand into. Bourgeois critics think its object is ‘sad’ because they imagine that it is unalterable; defensive poets anticipate that response and are urged on by it, its negation of their lives however shut up and exploited and needlessly damaged is still the annihilation of everything that they have and wish to work with. They know instinctively and pre-emptively how to resist that response and their poetry offers to it a humane and total answer, by bringing forthrightly into view everything in the poet’s life that breaks it up and steals the time of it; and they do so on the grounds that this capacity to know and to love better than they can that which is at once *an excess* and *something unfulfilled* is itself a real social power. They know all this and they are capable of drawing from it the natural inference, which is that to seize that power now and to recognise it not as an ‘aspiration’ but as a reality represents one step towards the abolition of this world in which there is no power except the power to exploit, and no permissible excess except the excess of sentimental tears that are wept by the exploiters.

The excess of unfulfilment is a power. This is the slogan of the poetry of collective self-defence against the whimsical moralism of individual self-aggrandisement. Like all slogans, it is meant to condense an historical reality into a practical imperative, which is to say that it is meant to aid our thinking about how that reality might be exceeded. Capital abandons production and moves overseas, it leaves ‘the garbage cans parked full strewn/ around our defaulting cities’;⁸ it then floods back into them in the form of private prison operators and other novel means of murderous repression. Later it develops the technologies to allow whatever wealthy residents remain in de-industrialised zones to recruit workers to clear up their garbage but no one else’s; it learns to profit from interactions that previously would have been too atomised or ‘molecular’ for it to notice even if they were to float repulsively in its soup.⁹ All the while it succeeds ‘overseas’ in liberating into its factories hundreds of millions of people who previously had been tied self-sustainingly to the land. How can this reality be exceeded? If historically the activity of self-defence has belonged mainly to those who are abandoned by capital – to those who are forced to struggle chiefly with its terroristic border guards at the edges of states and in the centres of their largest conurbations – today the stakes have changed; and capital can now abandon you and take you up again several times even within the limits of a single lifetime ordinarily brutalised and foreshortened. What does this mean for the political category of self-defence? And what does this mean for the language of self-defence, for defensiveness as a property of poetry intransigently committed to achieving a pre-emptive insight into the scale and the complexity of life that has been broken and cast off and fenced in and that still is not content to view itself as privatively ‘under-privileged’ or ‘deprived’ or merely evocatively dead?

Some of these questions might be tested against the following lines by the poet Nat Raha:

increasingly white bodies dispersed
 early hours, new cross road:
 where we’ve held out in the try collective of us
 to construct a wedge ~~stable~~ , of ~~permanence~~ we

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See e.g., Pricewaterhouse Coopers, ‘The Sharing Economy’, online at <<https://www.pwc.com/us/en/technology/publications/assets/pwc-consumer-intelligence-series-the-sharing-economy.pdf>>.

so broken out of belonging together
 root & rubble piling upon action to bruise, to be
 thrown only back into privacy
 / landlord behest::
 sick w/ increase on values, the
 suffering of our friends

This passage comes from ‘((a fire))’, the first poem from a book titled *Of Sirens / Body and Faultlines*.¹⁰ Raha has said of the zine format in which the poem was published that she wished the texts to ‘disappear’; this I think is another way of saying that she didn’t desire the poems to possess any more permanence than the people who are constantly flattened out by capitalist development in the city about which she writes. In any case, these are lines that die out freely and hotly on a border of necessitousness, that will go nowhere unfixedly, elaborating their brokenness as the substitute for abandonment and imposition. They are the push-factor for meaning that Amiri Baraka once sarcastically said was ‘self imposed’: ‘the only thing worth living for’ if being the only person alive is your kind of thing.¹¹ The words that get struck out in the fourth line are a joke about visibility: deletions highlighted in signal contrast to lives that are more silently extinguished, administratively shut out from the poem by the white bodies that fill it up in the ‘early hours’ of the commuter shift. They are a kind of reading notes: also a muted commentary on the passive voice in which the first quoted line in this passage is constructed, a gloss for the grammar of ignorance is bliss.¹² More simply they are an invitation to a closer and more sustained attention to what might here be the description of a squat eviction or the breaking up of a shared home, of lives ‘thrown only back into privacy’, which is the condition in which we are ‘so broken out of belonging together’, each of these lines assembled out of the displaced prepositional rubble of the other, divided up by a self-commentary:

so broken *back* belonging together
root & rubble piling upon action to bruise, to be
thrown only *out of* privacy

The yearning they express is for the process to be reversed, for it to be possible to go back, to belong together again, to be thrown out of the isolation that is irresistibly brought about by a political economy based in the inflationary monetisation of basic human needs. The poem cries out for privacy *and* for association, mixes them up in 'scenes of pollutant song'; needs

¹⁰ Nat Raha, *Of Sirens – Body and Faultlines* (London: Veer Books 2016). Raha provides the following primer on her blog: ‘as I said about the first edition - the pamphlet corresponds with ‘radio / threat’. it was mostly written between summer 2014 and spring 2015 (with a few exceptions). trying to excavate and map sensations, discordances, the transformations of police reality and capital / canary wharf lookouts, moments of rupture in the locale of New Cross / Deptford in South London and beyond, of collectivity and protest, of what we are now calling radical transfeminism, of the constellations of violence that pivot around a government department known as the Home Office between the future and over 200 years before it was founded, of vague histories need to be reclaimed and understood in the sense of understanding as a necessary synonym of decolonialisation’ <<http://sociopatheticsemaphores.blogspot.co.uk/>>.

¹¹ Baraka, 'Gatsby's Theory of Aesthetics' *Transbluesency*, p. 132.

¹² The point is that under current circumstances, white bodies are not ‘dispersed’ but *concentrated*.

made contradictory only by the restriction of the space in which they can be articulated are not diligently picked apart but are instead made spectacularly to collide. The ‘wedge’ that we tried to construct is denatured into a ‘we’ and an ‘edge’, then the ‘we’ is shunted out to the end of the line and is declassified into the edge that it was at first separated from. All the way across the jagged perimeter of this poetry and then out of and back into the heart of it, tenuous sense is left on display, scattered sensationally throughout the bits and pieces of descriptive vocabulary, tossed away or carelessly made to heap up against the ‘suffering of our friends’, which is the one fact in these lines whose necessary recognition cannot be gotten clear from or broken down or made into a commentary on some text element that preceded it.

Defensive poetry sees pre-emptively into the fullest extent of the damage to which it is exposed. It sees into it pre-emptively and it recognises in its detail a moving and communicative power, the use of which is not restricted to poetry but is the tenuous material of political connections that are still to be fleshed out in the reality that individually we get lost in. Raha’s poetry indicates an historical qualification of this argument: the fullest extent of the damage to which we are now exposed has become intensely changeable, mobile and dispersive, as capital has itself become changeable, mobile and dispersive within and beyond the cities in which we live and as the points of connection and commonality between exploited and despairing people thousands of miles apart have multiplied, have ramified and grown together, and at last have grown up and expanded and acquired a richer and more exacting language, so that they are no longer mathematical points or nodes on a graph of shared interests but have become instead the shared bruises, sore spots, and developed antipathies of a more substantive form of political mutuality.

How can this new mutuality be defended? It is easy to see how it might be destroyed, since the processes that threaten it are the same ones that bring it barely and incipiently into being. As capital expands into new areas of social life, it simultaneously abandons others. The kind of unfulfilment that has historically been created wherever money flees from a population is now expressed just as commonly in the political poetry of the contemporary Guangdong factory worker as it is in the poetry of the community activist. In this connection the description in Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital* of the way in which capital accumulation is ‘primarily a relationship between capital and a non-capitalist environment’ has never been more true.¹³ Her description of the *process* through which this ‘relationship’ is established, by means of ‘[the] most complicated relations, divergences in the speed and direction of accumulation ... material and value relations with non-capitalist modes of production’ has never been more evidently exact.¹⁴ It becomes more formally exact not only because of its resistance to ‘rigid formulae’ but because of its expressive tone and style. Now just as much as in 1972 Amiri Baraka’s ‘jumble of frustrations and unfilled capacities’ are the closest thing that we have in our *internal* lives to non-capitalist environments. They

¹³ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, translated by Agnes Schwarzschild (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 398.

¹⁴ Ibid. The translation is slightly modified. In German the passage in full runs: ‘Die Akkumulation ist nicht bloß ein inneres Verhältnis zwischen den Zweigen der kapitalistischen Wirtschaft, sondern vor allem ein Verhältnis zwischen Kapital und dem nichtkapitalistischen Milieu, in dem jeder der beiden großen Zweige der Produktion den Akkumulationsprozeß zum Teil auf eigene Faust unabhängig vom anderen durchmachen kann, wobei sich die Bewegung beider wieder auf Schritt und Tritt kreuzt und ineinander verschlingt. Die sich daraus ergebenden komplizierten Beziehungen, die Verschiedenheit des Tempos und der Richtung im Gang der Akkumulation beider Abteilungen, ihre sachlichen und Wertzusammenhänge mit nichtkapitalistischen Produktionsformen, lassen sich nicht unter einen exakten schematischen Ausdruck bringen’.

are blasts of fire in the consciousness of insane cruelty, unsanitary vacancies lit up against a backdrop of relative value. They are graveyards of youth that we watch over with perverse contrariness so as to know them more completely than our enemies who look over our shoulders. They are the quintessence of that 'deprivation' that policymakers moaningly compassionate and that political poets like Xu Lizhi have pre-emptively defended; and they are the possibilities of a broken-down speech that in Raha's poems are pulled apart and put back together again at top speed in a blur of intelligent probation. They are all of these things and they are also historically changeable; and in more recent poetry it becomes more and more clear that they are not stable fields of expressive dissatisfaction in relation to which we have no obligation except to fortify their borders, since just at the point where they are felt most intensely they now split up, as Luxemburg predicted for political economy, into 'the most complicated relations', and pass through perpetual divergences in the speed and direction of their accumulation; forks in their relationship to their capitalist environment; forward leaps and reverses in their potential expressive intensity; and more generally through all of the changes that might be expected to arise in dynamic social system whose growth and development has precisely nothing to do with human desire and satisfaction.

What is most deeply characteristic of this vertiginous transformation is not anything so simple-mindedly straightforward as an 'acceleration' of social relationships; it is a widening of the extremities within which historical struggles are formed and between which our jumble of frustrations and unfilled capacities are strung out. As more and more human beings are permitted to aspire to and also to achieve the kind of poetry that Xu Lizhi achieved so movingly, more and more people are faced with the threat that *everything* that they possess will be valued at and terroristically reduced to *nothing*, on the basis that investment capital has been feeling a little up and down recently. Luxemburg's statement is important because she *anticipated this historical transformation*: because she knew that the defence of the excess of our unfulfilment would become for all proletarians more and more like a race across the entire surface of social need, that the surface is perpetually expanding, and that this can be true even with respect to the non-capitalist environments of a single human life; and because she saw this not so much in what she said as in the sudden spring in the tension of the expression of her argument, in the forward leap into a grammar in which any number of differences can all be viewed simultaneously in a thunderstorm of signals whirling furiously into a blank. Luxemburg anticipated this transformation; and today Nat Raha produces poetry that is buffeted at the centre of it; and until 2014 Xu Lizhi also lived through it, and ran headlong into it, and chased his own capacities right into the centre of that propagandistic black hole into which non-capitalist environments are sucked only to be spat out again as slogans on employee wellness in the Foxconn/Hon Hai *Social and Environmental Responsibility Report*.

Each of these writers provides a different point of access onto the same social reality. In this reality, which is the reality both of super-exploitation and of urban abandonment and penury, it is not only our ability to realise our desires or clearly to express them but even our ability to feel them that must be fought for and defended. *With no time for expression, emotion crumbles into dust*. Each of the writers mentioned above shows us this and each of them shows us also that in poetry the fight cannot be won, that it is a losing proposition, that it can arrest but not halt the total liquidation of whatever vital powers we happen still to possess. Each of them shows us this, and yet each of them proves in spite of it a contrary position, which is that any new radical politics that would permit us to express our desires clearly or to realise them in practice will *nevertheless be absolutely worthless* until it can open itself up to the tones of those for whom even the capacity to feel can never be

communicated except in the form of one long perseverant fight to the death.¹⁵ There will be no meaningful new radical politics that is incapable of speaking in the same tones as those for whom even the next breath is something that has to be defended at all costs. Those who now deny this proposition acquiesce to the insane violence of historical relativity and reduce to nothing a struggle that for many people has been *everything that they could do* to sustain themselves in the face of conditions that are absolutely inimical to dignified social life. The procedure is as technically well-established as it is violently reductive. It mistakes proximity to death in desperate struggle *for death itself*, tragic and unavoidable; or it condescends to that struggle as nothing more than an expressive flight into an individualised ‘therapeutic’ bourgeois defence mechanism. It promotes a deafness to human expressive life whose flipside is an equally wild overestimation of the difference between the grandest schemes of bourgeois reform and the ‘treachery’ of their promoters.

The principle expression of this overestimation is familiar: it is the deep disappointment that results whenever the promoters of bourgeois reform schemes come to admit under pressure that the only defence mechanism worthy of the name is the expressive flight of investment capital into whatever new and unprotected markets are best stocked with reserves of tragic human material. The accusation of ‘treachery’ that is expressed in these moments is the most unerringly decisive proof of the tone-deafness of those who believe themselves to have been betrayed.

And at the bottom of all of this there is a simple lesson. Anyone who chooses to listen to writing like Xu Lizhi’s patiently and attentively engages in a fight against the insane violence of historical relativity in whose detail existing capitalist society is one long drawn-out crash course. Those of us who are not Xu Lizhi’s friends or comrades must *choose* to listen to his writing, we cannot be compelled to hear what goes on in the space it stakes out and guards, since the poetry truly does lack even the most absolutely catastrophically reduced capacity to fight back against those who would ignore it in a fit of condescension. Nothing that Xu Lizhi has done or that anyone else will ever do will ever be able to compel understanding of the writing in those who are determined to hear in it nothing but the tragic *absence* of the poetry that in the great shelf of their petty class prejudices will always take pride of place. The edict is terminal. No work of contextualisation of the writing will ever be able to wake melancholy journalists in the business press from their dream of themselves, and no insight into the work’s withheld excesses will ever throw literary critics through the windscreen of their own aspirations, and no response to the tonal pressure of the work no matter how passionately stated will ever be able to persuade bourgeois reformers of the bankruptcy of any revolutionary thinking that cannot speak in the tones of those who have had to defend everything they possess incessantly no matter how small right down to the very last vanishing breath. And yet the lesson to be learned is that *in spite of all this* anyone who goes on treating the writing as if it were nothing is in for a horribly nasty surprise.

Appendix: from a Letter to some Friends

... I am not very happy with the essay that I sent to you both, I have re-written it several times

¹⁵ As another writer who knew pretty well about this logic put it: ‘The man who has never received a kind message, a gesture, and who has never held anything of value, material or otherwise, if he is healthy, or I should say remains healthy (my persuasion presupposes original innocence), he never becomes so practical as to expect more of the same – nothing. Less but never nothing.’

To be denied or rejected means less to this man but never nothing’.

already, though not as many times as the file name indicates, which derives instead from an increasingly ferocious paranoia about data loss; but it still lack to my eyes any clear sense of internal purpose. It is neither really an essay about Xu Lizhi nor an essay about self-defence. The atmosphere of distractibility is as thick as the atmosphere on any fresh spring morning in downtown Shanghai. One commitment overtakes another and then rides slowly into the crash barrier of its own word count.

What I wanted to do primarily is to write an essay about a particular kind of tone. It is obvious to me that tonal particularity in poetry (and not just in poetry) is a product of basic psychological disposition. Psychology is the base to poetry's tonal superstructure. The expressive range that is available in any kind of writing that cares about things like 'expressive range' is pre-determined to a substantial extent by the attitudinal habits of the writer. If the writer mostly thinks about social suffering by processing articles on the internet (the psychology of compulsive indigestion), then the tonal contour that they are most likely to be able to access is of a kind of sublime horror. Their writing will be irresistibly controlled by this primary experience, of watching something unimaginably large and complex drip tortuously through one uselessly constricting but also unsealable aperture, the drive-in window repurposed into a bilge pipe. Different writers will be able to express this basic psychological habitus with different degrees of ferocity or sycophantic complacency, depending on who they are and how much they get paid for being it; and some of them will be able to manipulate the tone to which it gives rise with great and impressive facility; and some of them will be able to drive it towards its further limits of intensity; and some of them will be able to learn from it right up to its outermost accession; – but the tone is still basically the same regardless. I am not putting this very well. I mean I suppose that the very best writer 'in this line' is likely to throw all of their energies into the task of heightening and of accenting and of speeding up into a kind of ffw vertiginous pogrom in a snow-globe the *basic* psychological experience of digitally processing the data of contemporary social misery. If the *basic* experience is inattentive, twitchy, trigger happy on a trackpad, then what poetry will do is serviceably pimp that basic experience into a riot of expressive confusion. Out of the everyday experience of getting waylaid on a historical learning curve and dragged off by an impulse to the virtual clothes store (or whatever) it will discount the whole universe by 50%. Out of the experience of not knowing what to click on next it will user-generate a more totally hyperventilated parataxis. The tone is overwhelming and luxurious and seductive; but it is still a translation of the same old familiar mental bad habits, unaltered by being formidably built out into an OCD megamall criss-crossed by overused conjunctions.

In the face of this kind of work it is not adequate to say that it is necessary to produce 'better writing'. Some of this writing may be deliriously good *as a translation* of the basic psychological attitude from which it results: but this is like saying that the military junta in Egypt is deliriously good as a translation of the Mubarak regime of 2009. It is not the deluxe intensification of the attitude which needs changing *but the attitude itself*. It is a precondition for poetry that its authors learn to rip out of their heads the affirmative tendency to treat suffering as if it were most conspicuously sublimely excessive and 'horrible'. The cultivation of this basic attitude involves the exorbitant waste of expressive energy not on overcoming a social and political limitation but on making that limitation fierce and strange and impetuously seductive. With every new accomplishment in the extreme intensification of the tone that is associated with this mental habit, which is in its everyday form unutterably tedious and banal, poets bring about a new reason to believe that the attitude is intrinsically worthwhile and defensible. By throwing all of their powers of invention and originality into the service of upcycling (and tonally dynamising) the basic attitude of psychological bewilderment and indirection, they fortify in their audiences the conviction that, because their basic mental habits can be expressed intensely, there is no reason for those habits to be denied

or refuted or overcome. The negative outcome of this conviction is that poetry can become more and more tonally explosive and far-out even as it makes other and more humane and fierce and politically desirable attitudes progressively less and less possible both for its authors and its readers. The constant tonal dynamising of attitudes of sublime horror in art makes it more and more evidently impossible to imagine that any other attitude could ever be brought to expression with the same kind of impetuous force; it makes it harder to imagine that any other attitude could ever blow up in the centre of our customary syntax and speech-music with the same sort of urgent propagandistic effect.

I say all this to set up some background for a quite different kind of response. One of the reasons why Xu Lizhi's writing had the effect on me that it did was that it shocked me into a recognition of the fact that there are other attitudes towards which contemporary poets might feel instinctively and powerfully drawn. The tone of his writing seems to me as if it is in some very crisp and straightforward sense the *opposite* of the tone of the writing I am describing above. It is a fiercely defensive tone because it recognises out of lived necessity the need to hang on to every moment of expressive potential however bruised or lacerated and however dented or foreshortened may be the poems that are wrung out of those moments. The tone rises up out of a psychology that cannot afford to find suffering sublimely excessive, that needs to *hold on* to the individual victim-opponents of social cruelty. Often the tone of the work cannot be driven to excess and the poems give conscious voice to this fact; they just have to happen anyway; and more than that they *just have* to happen, because if they don't then there is nothing else and because any increment of life that can be won against that eventuality is everything to the person who knows how close they are to finding life absolutely unliveable. It is meaningless to talk about whether they are 'good' or 'bad' poems, they are a lesson in something that from the perspective of the writers of the most sublimely blocked up and contrivedly bewildered poetry will simply seem unthinkable. The attitude that they evince is completely foreign to anyone who has become accustomed to the idea that the suffering of an individual cannot be expressively conceived otherwise than as a spectacular case of injustice that then stands in for a million other case of cruelty that all belong under the same heading. I don't think that we know, in our present situation, what it would sound like if anyone or if a large group of 'English-language' writers, a movement or a collective, were to achieve by some effort of sustained commitment or will a real and practical insight into the *basic* attitude of Xu Lizhi's writing. I don't think that we know what it would sound like if that attitude were suddenly to punch its way through into the tone of the poetry that the candidate-writers are now composing. I don't think we know what that would sound like; and so I have no idea at all what it would mean for more writers to learn not only to adopt the attitude of defensiveness that we can find in Xu Lizhi, but also to do with it just what has been done for the *basic attitude* of psychological indigestion and hyperpneic awestruckness that is now thanks to a great deal of English-language writing the most tonally elaborated and outspoken and dynamised basic attitude in our contemporary culture. I have no idea what it would be like if there were to surge into the world a poetry whose attitude of careful and defensive commitment to the real lives of suffering and exploited individuals were also as freely intensified and dynamised, and as tonally elaborated and iconised, as the postures of helplessness and impotent display that have become the ultimate tax-free havens for whatever bourgeois expressive libidinal energy is left now that high culture has slid triumphantly into administration. But I do think that a writing like this might help people to *live* instead of annually upgrading their experience of failing to.

