

Strange Realism

It's ordinary,

Memory doesn't exist/  
because it isn't mine

take my feelings  
i don't especially

want  
or need

depletion them  
the problem is

there are more than enough

extinctive hydrocarbons

accumulation to do it over

again

Real Time Strategy

really

I grow on your ruin, hold you in my  
I share conversation/in the scarce greenways.  
dryness. I need things like you to be a part of  
as I briefly remember our time together.

that's carefully careless, hold my breath  
sweedy, just so  
I touch my hair in a way  
seventh, sometimes when moonlight splashes  
not here, you are not now. You were my  
This is our last moment, I am  
about it, if you feel a thing all

of power

don't be in the unlocking the gate, w  
beyond such the really, if you think  
about it, if you feel a thing all

structural oppression/ is untranslatable/  
ing in the interstices/ acknowledged  
categories/ taxonomies/ obviate the need/  
for actual, real/ change whatever that is.  
let's keep/ recognizing/ our headcanon  
control's/ the best racket/ to run.

The pangit  
Fever

there are no stories, only happy  
little violences that keep  
the plot/ ticking over.

extreme  
in which  
of the process

A Cruel Action // Epigenetics

it's not phony  
to assert  
that what's  
mine is yours  
and  
whats yours

My time is your time  
I mean it's yours  
I've bought it  
where debt is the  
paid me up  
include  
it's for you  
what the fuck do we even know  
use can now  
like it were yours

Have Formed a Space to Go Into/ Go into it Yourself  
your  
own  
my time  
is your

so much  
but  
a person  
to learn to be  
that's  
I would like  
okay  
you

afford

having so much  
of your time  
makes mine/  
yours/

not  
not  
not  
not  
not

Louis  
Mary H

riddled with corruptio

perfect project

There is no sign of one

one

relieve to everything else



suauuglj /speqlq 8utshl

An Enormous Eye  
hevinir thar

“The brain will let any number of things go to pot as long as I stay alive. That’s because the brain is part of I. Look. A book *is*, a ship *is*, Tarik *is*, the universe *is*; but, as you must have noticed, I *am*.” (Samuel R. Delany, *Babel-17*)

There is less of an I than we think there is.

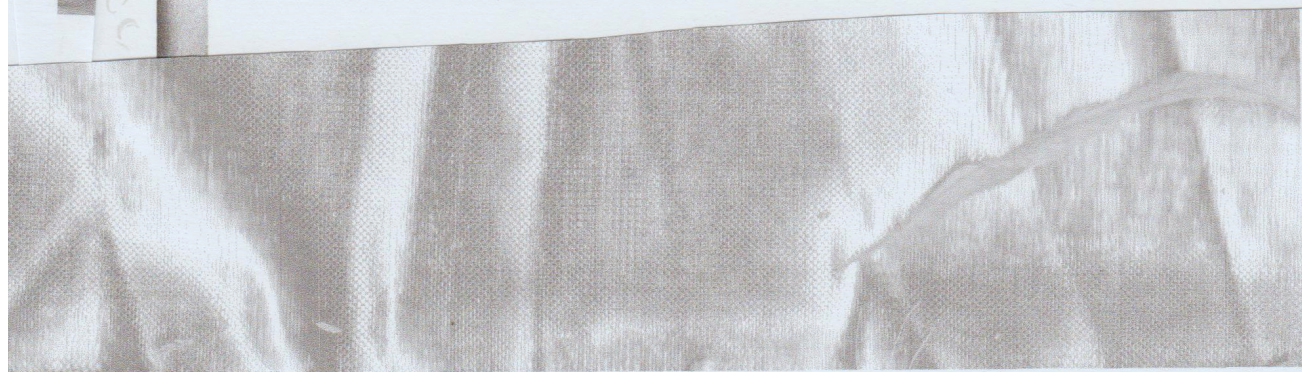
Neoliberal selfhood is such a barren, tawdry thing. It’s a kind of gilded aspirational selfhood that’s always really about inexistence: of time, happiness, restfulness, spaces of the body and its surroundings... an accumulative mass of plasticated bullshit. In some ways, it’s quite a new thing (in terms of the convocation of precarity, naturalised selfishness and digitised socioeconomy), but in other ways it goes back to disastrous thinkers such as John Locke, who formulated a modern (i.e. colonial, proto-capitalist) conception of the self that effectively constituted an enclosure of personhood.

One of the perennial enemies of experimental/innovative/radical/whatever-you-want-to-call-it poetry is lyric poetry; that is, poetry that addresses and expresses (or perhaps projects/promotes) personal emotions, often in the first person. Naturally, the assumptive subject of lyric, the I who wanders lonely as a cloud, has frequently been some white dude (probably William Wordsworth), who has the option of poetic self-expression by virtue of occupying the unmarked position.

Of course, lyric poetry was at one point itself experimental/innovative/radical/new, and there isn’t necessarily a causal thread or arrow that can be drawn straightforwardly from Locke to Wordsworth to Thatcher to our present moment. However, the “I” of lyric has come to be the default mode of poetic expression. “I” is also “eye,” that is, a way of seeing, and a position(ality) from which things are seen. Poetry has lost its purchase as a language of the commons – “I” doesn’t really address anyone reading it, except inasmuch as they might aspire to replicate that mode of selfhood.

Some of my favourite contemporary poetry – I’m thinking here of Stephen Mooney’s *The Cursory Epic* and Robert Kiely’s *Gelpack Allegory* – instead enlists a poetic “you” that’s simultaneously precarious/dystopian/deflated [realism] and liminal/protean/chaotic [strange]. A poem in the second person is genuinely trying to reach someone – as David Ashford, another excellent poet, says: “like a message in a bottle across the dystopian ocean...”

Another thing which springs to mind when I think about the “I” of poetry (and of neoliberalism) is the notion suggested by some science fiction





scholars (Samuel R. Delany, Damien Broderick) that science fiction is a mode of writing/fictioning in which the object takes precedence over, or perhaps displaces/replaces, the subject. Delany suggests that this is something sf and poetry have in common, a preoccupation with the thinginess of things. Of course, people are things too, both in the dystopian sense of sinking to the level of the commodity, but also in that we are part of the commons of life.

In Delany's novel *Babel-17*, there's a scene where the protagonist (a queer, polyamorous, neurodivergent Asian poet/space captain/codebreaker called Rydra) is speaking to another character (named Butcher) who has no sense of self, largely due to speculative military industrial complex shenanigans/brutalities, and trying to help him develop an understanding of what "I" and "you" mean. After some initial progress, Rydra realises that Butcher has been using "you" to mean "I" or "me" and vice-versa:

"What I talk about as I, you must speak of as you. And the other way round, don't you see?"

"Are they the same word for the same thing, that they are interchangeable?"

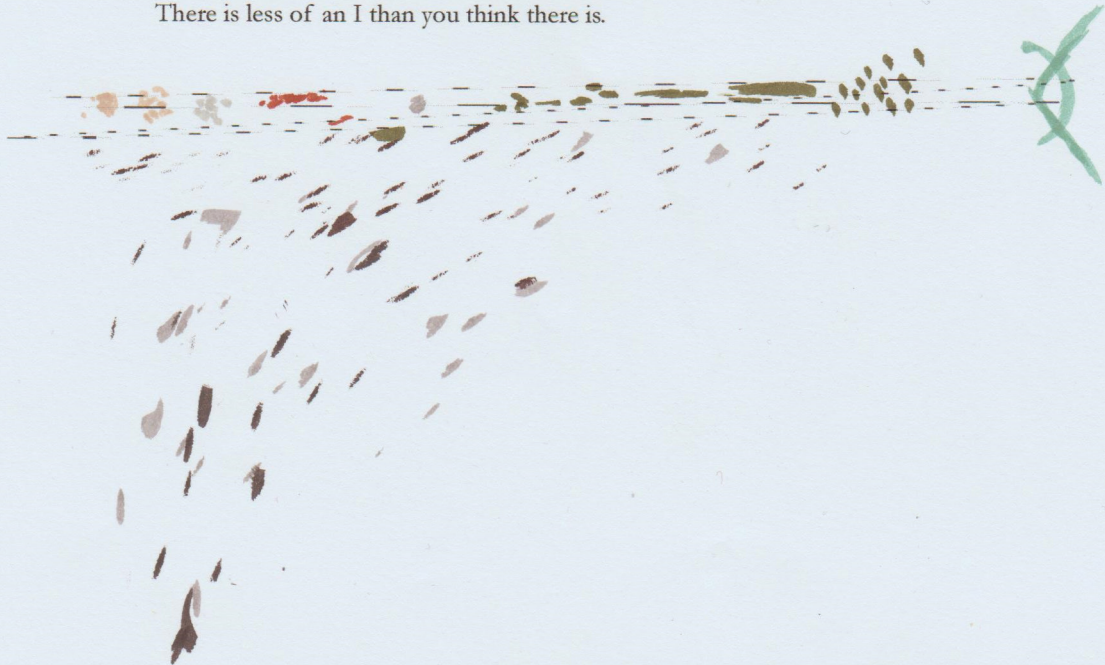
"No, just ... yes! They both mean the same sort of thing. In a way they're the same."

"Then you and I are the same."

Many (perhaps all) of my poems are written with what I think of as "Babel-17 rules" in mind: that is, feel free to read any "I" as "you" and vice-versa. Read as intentionally or unintentionally as you like, in whatever direction you fancy, skipping or repeating lines or words or segments. There is no misreading, or perhaps there is only misreading.

"You are not frightened of the things I am frightened of. I am not frightened of the things you are frightened of. That's good, isn't it?" (*Babel-17*)

There is less of an I than you think there is.



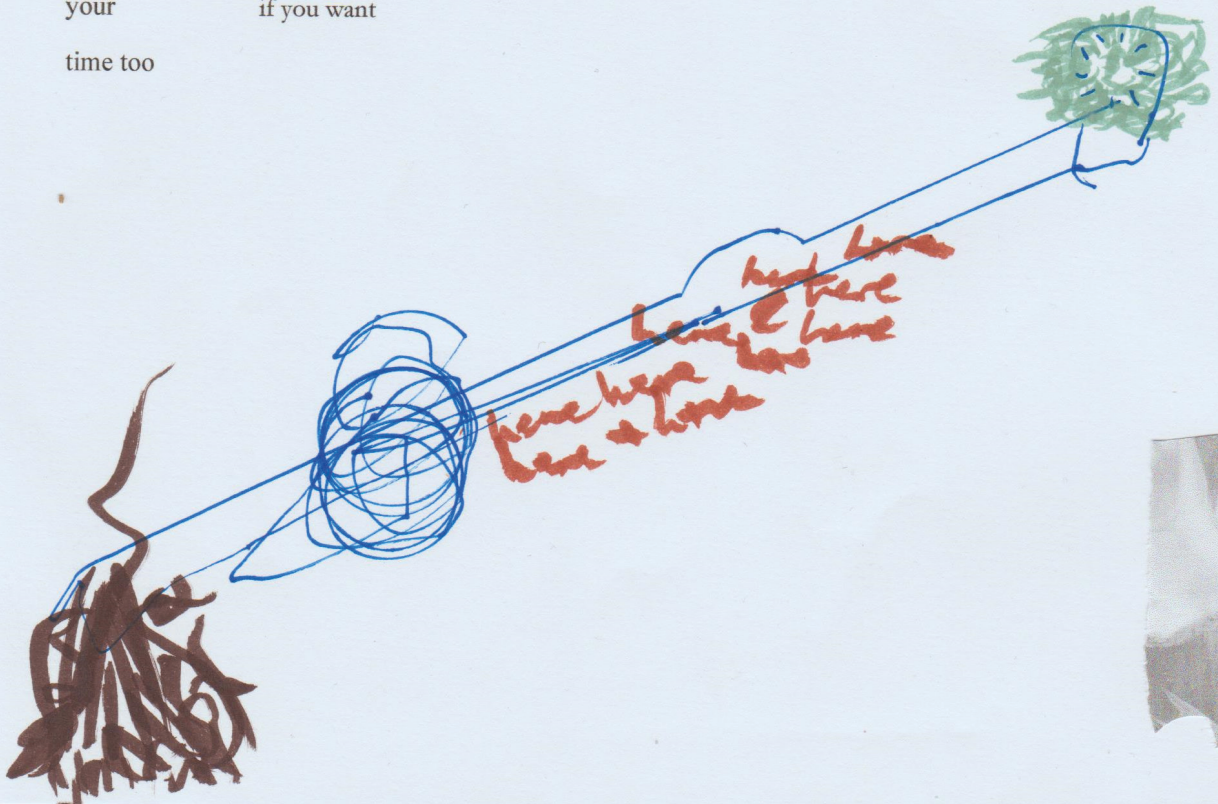
The three poems below originated as free written notes to Larry Achiampong and David Blandy's GENETIC AUTOMATA film series, exhibiting at the Wellcome Collection until 11 February 2024.

Real Time Strategy

Memory doesn't exist/  
because it isn't mine  
take my feelings  
i don't especially  
want  
or need  
depletion them  
the problem is  
there are more than enough  
extinctive hydrocarbons  
accumulation to do it over  
again

## A Cruel Fiction // Epigenetics

it's not phony	My time is your time	there's
to assert	I mean it's yours	so much
that what's	you've bought it	but
mine is yours	paid me up	that's
and	it's for you	okay
whats yours	you can use it	you can
is	like it were yours	afford
your	though	it
own	having so much	which is
my time	of your time	just as well
is your	makes mine/	as
time,	I mean yours/	my time
it's your	worthless	is really
money,	I am not you	yours
and	but you can be me	
your	if you want	
time too		



## Hit Points

progress/  
    'outdated'  
        science  
the world we  
    inhabit,  
    that is continually  
destroyed and  
        remade  
has been set to  
    osseous parameters  
going back to the invention  
of 'race'

what does it matter  
    that my ideas are  
flawed?  
    intoxicated  
        by systematisation  
the undying, unchanging  
    self  
the lands beyond  
the west  
    a genocide  
guaranteed  
    dream of an  
emptiness  
        just / for / you



## Diminishing Returns

You Have Failed  
You Have Failed To  
Reproduce  
You Have Failed  
To Replicate Yourself  
(The Conditions Of Your Possibility)  
Being Born  
Was Your First  
Opportunity To Fail  
And You Failed  
You're A Terrible  
Amoeba  
And A Worse  
Consumer  
(But That's Okay)  
Fail  
Smarter,  
Better,  
Mercilessly,  
Pragmatically,  
Efficiency  
Is Only A Limiting Factor  
I, You,  
Believe In You  
So

Keep  
It  
Up,  
Peasant.





Colchian Skeletons need their Overnight Oats

deflation  
inhaling space, there'll  
always be a little bit more  
                                a little bit  
just a little  
                                sunk costs,  
                                as a treat  
can keep growing  
through  
Finitude  
                                caustic ash  
                                shredded sail lines  
                                crying without a tongue  
without a voice  
without a name  
                                the long, long  
Downturn  
                                i'm really not at my best right now,  
                                you know  
i'm really not  
                                at my best  
                                come back later,



the  
self  
hood.

the com  
ness of





is the co  
ness of

please,  
and you'll see  
what i mean  
it's not really okay  
it isn't  
we can keep shrinking and  
getting smaller,  
relative to everything else  
An Enormous Eye  
hoping that  
capital  
and plastics  
outlast us all  
stay close  
just a little close  
(goodbye, sweet jellyfish)  
No need  
for a time that is  
our Own  
when we can just  
Breathe  
Out



instru  
of the

structed-  
everything

**Coping Methods/If You Have Formed a Space to Go Into/Go into it Yourself**

what the fuck do we even know

i'll show you                      i would like                      by all means                      include                      indeterminate

my influence                      to learn to be                      where debt is the

i'll unend                      a person                      condition of                      weaning off                      there's nothing

                    your awkwardness i am intrigued                      communicate                      the currency

that was                      at the prospect                      crunched                      slithering into

never my own                      of really                      ice bags                      receipts (chemicals)                      the intensity

i would                      instantiating                      fragment                      what is the basis                      of the process

like to be                      the butchery                      end of year                      of your attention                      in which

upset                      neoliberal subject                      restrictions                      what is the basis                      extreme

i don't                      to truly                      of your duration                      boredom

need complicity,                      possess a                      is suppurating,

enough salt                      mind of 'your                      in the rafters

to hedge against                      i mean my                      oozing forth

terminus.                      'own'                      from the cardboard

                    who is we                      what is we                      the humid silence

*Vertical red scribbles and markings on the right side of the page.*

*Green scribbles and markings on the left side of the page.*

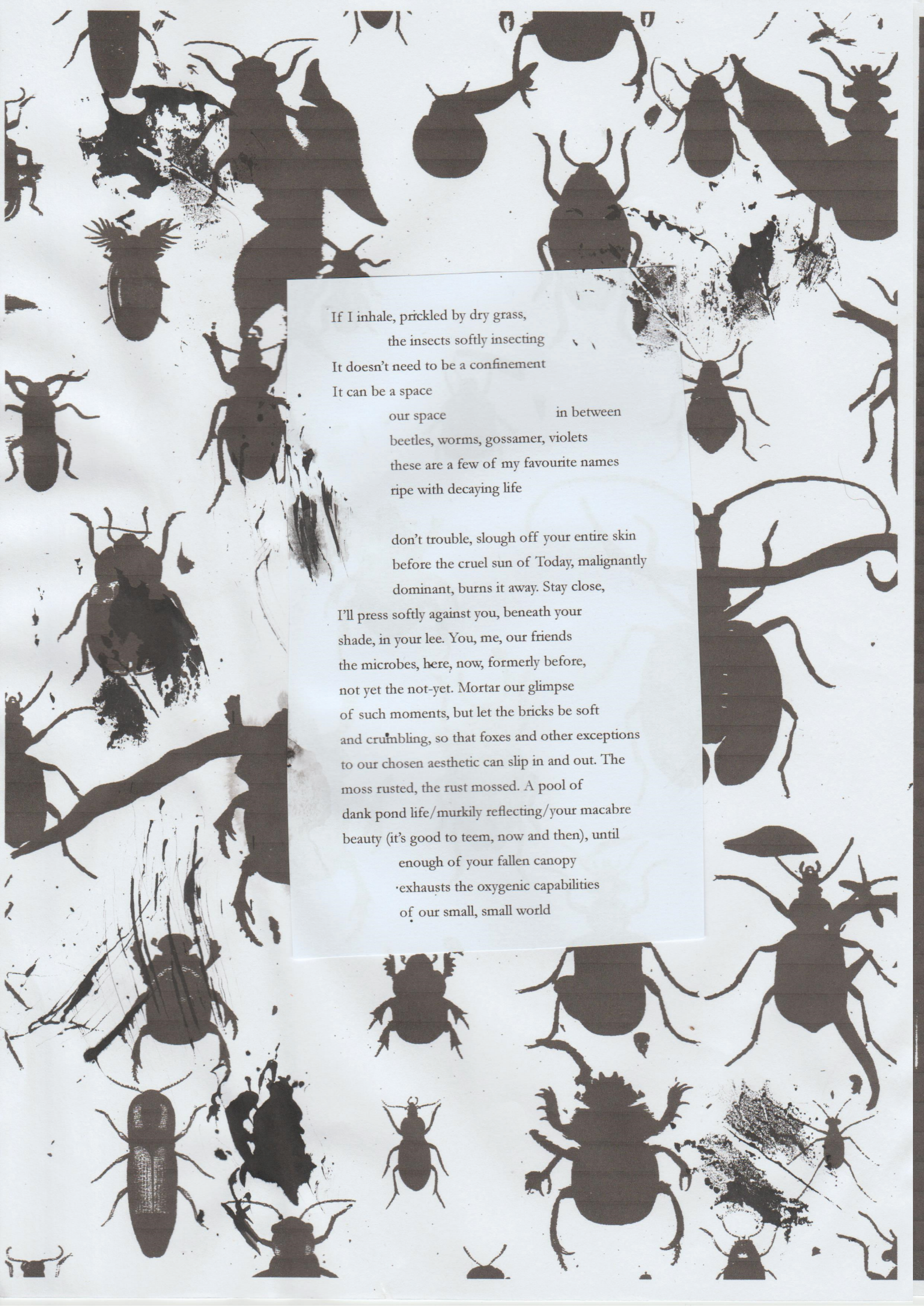


*extending something else*

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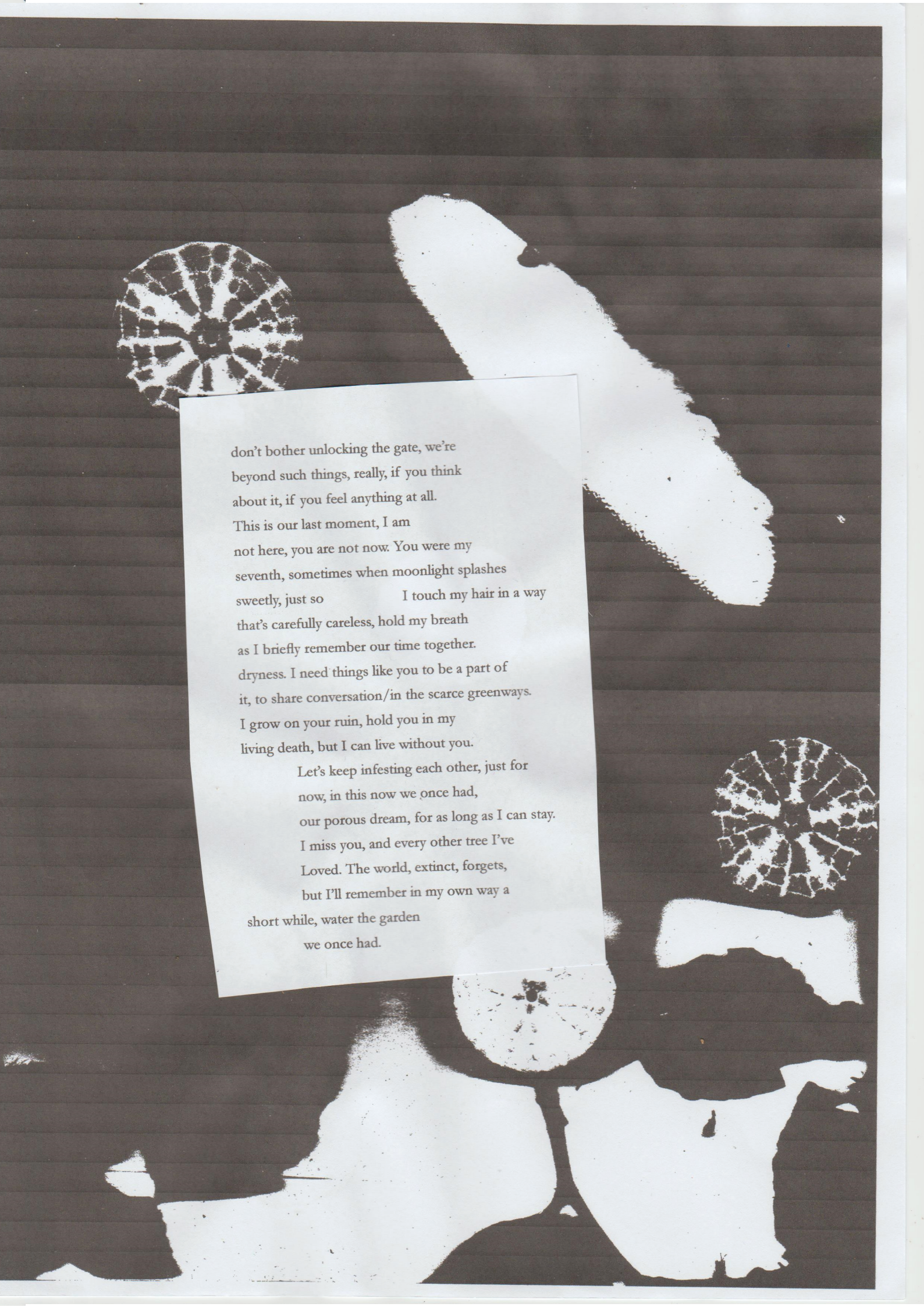
Manic Pixie Mushroom and Her Extinct Goth Tree  
Girlfriend

I've whispered seventeen trees,  
now, each time  
their musty groan  
an exhalation of duration  
a release  
years upon years of  
pollutants  
we're neither the disease  
nor the cure  
there is no historicity, toxicity  
is a blank space, if space it  
can be called  
They've never listened, except  
really that means I really that means  
we, if we can be called.  
They're listened to, outside the walls  
of borders of corpses of ever straightened  
lines of degradation without decay  
of ruins denied their own ruination  
poisoned and shattered to a wreckage  
labour without pay  
I'd like  
I'd really, like  
I'd like to, really  
I would like  
my desire isn't possible.  
You'd prefer  
what would you prefer.  
no, let's water our garden



If I inhale, pricked by dry grass,  
the insects softly insecting  
It doesn't need to be a confinement  
It can be a space  
our space in between  
beetles, worms, gossamer, violets  
these are a few of my favourite names  
ripe with decaying life

don't trouble, slough off your entire skin  
before the cruel sun of Today, malignantly  
dominant, burns it away. Stay close,  
I'll press softly against you, beneath your  
shade, in your lee. You, me, our friends  
the microbes, here, now, formerly before,  
not yet the not-yet. Mortar our glimpse  
of such moments, but let the bricks be soft  
and crumbling, so that foxes and other exceptions  
to our chosen aesthetic can slip in and out. The  
moss rusted, the rust mossed. A pool of  
dank pond life/murkily reflecting/your macabre  
beauty (it's good to teem, now and then), until  
enough of your fallen canopy  
exhausts the oxygenic capabilities  
of our small, small world



don't bother unlocking the gate, we're  
beyond such things, really, if you think  
about it, if you feel anything at all.

This is our last moment, I am  
not here, you are not now. You were my  
seventh, sometimes when moonlight splashes  
sweetly, just so I touch my hair in a way  
that's carefully careless, hold my breath  
as I briefly remember our time together.  
dryness. I need things like you to be a part of  
it, to share conversation/in the scarce greenways.  
I grow on your ruin, hold you in my  
living death, but I can live without you.

Let's keep infesting each other, just for  
now, in this now we once had,  
our porous dream, for as long as I can stay.  
I miss you, and every other tree I've  
Loved. The world, extinct, forgets,  
but I'll remember in my own way a  
short while, water the garden  
we once had.

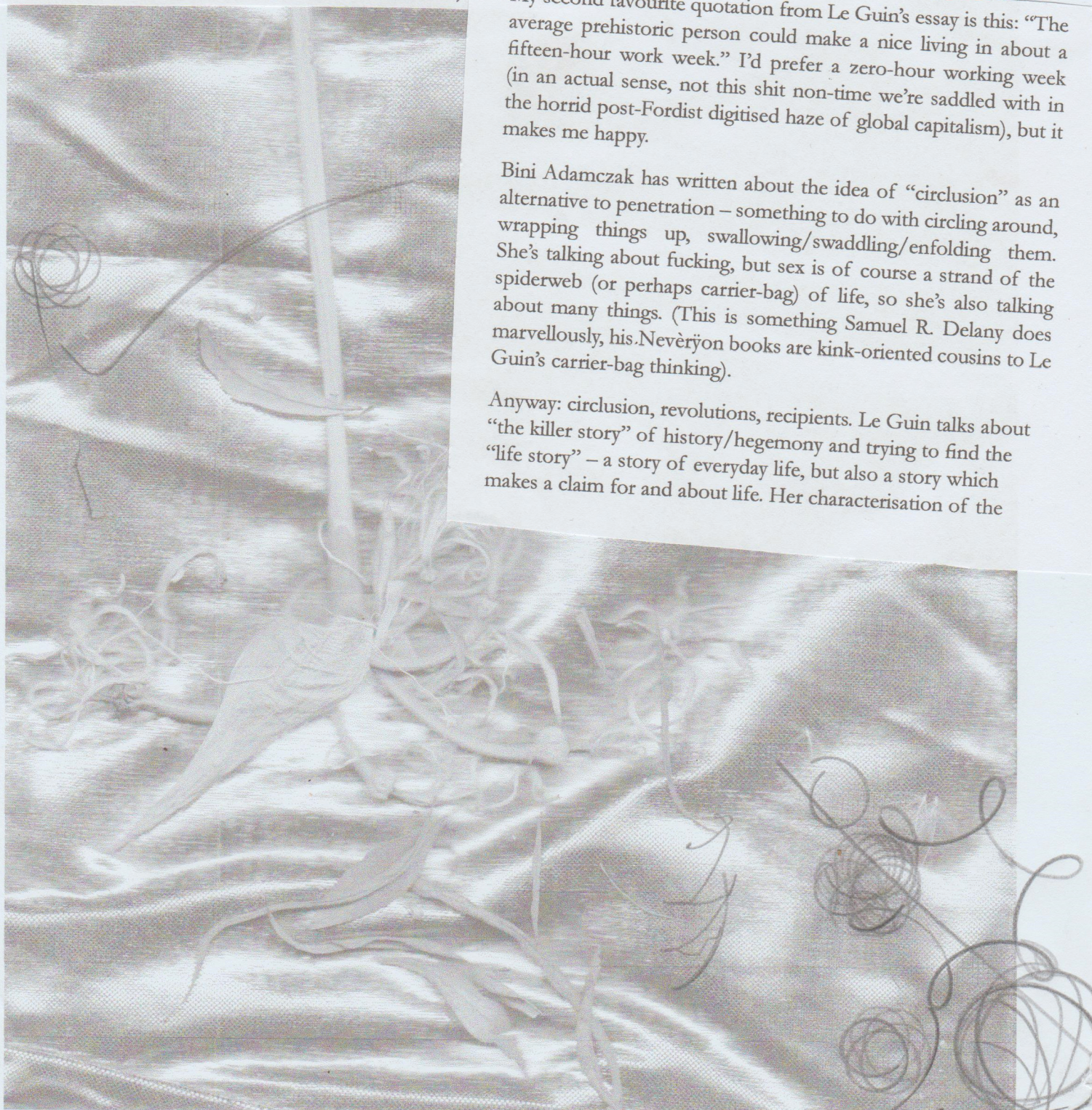
Writing in 2020, Anna Hundert (in "A Carrier-Bag Theory of Revolution") suggests that perhaps revolutions, circlings, are the only certainty. I'm not sure about that, but I like the idea. It's clear to me that nature – of which we are a part – is always in change. For all their appeal, I distrust and disbelieve monoliths, straight lines, arcing arrows.

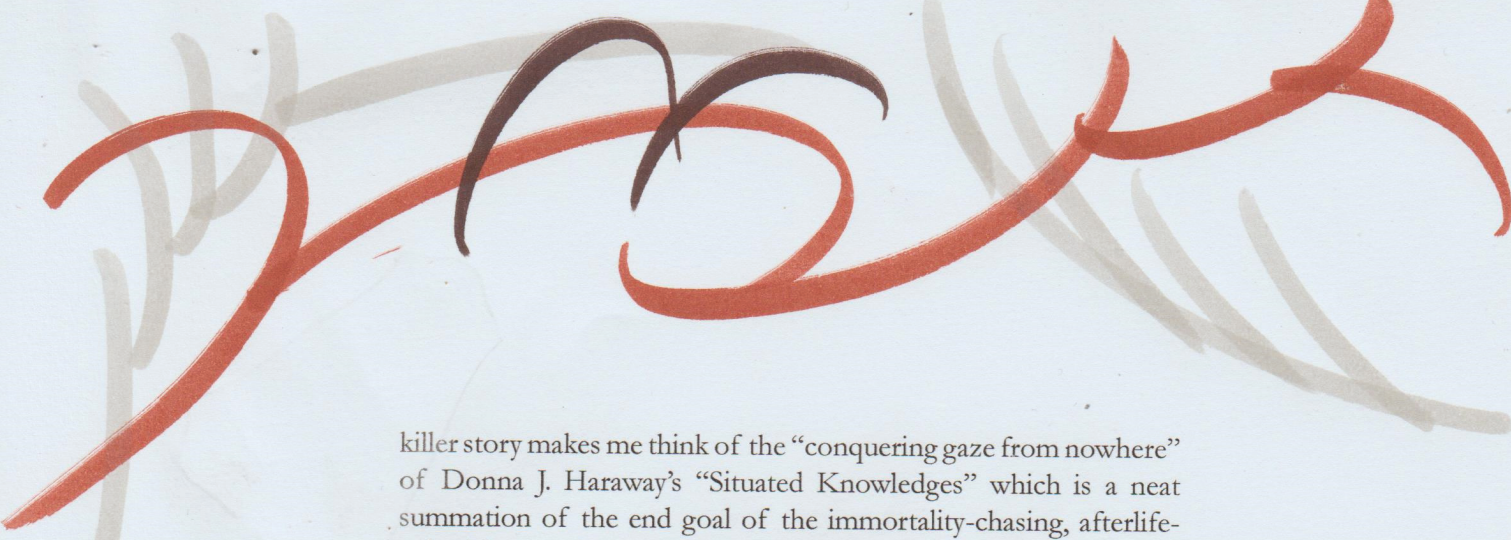
Following Elizabeth Fisher's suggestion (in *Women's Creation*) that "The first cultural device was probably a recipient," Ursula K. Le Guin proposes a Carrier-Bag Theory of Fiction in her essay of the same name. I recommend reading the piece, which is short, accessibly-written, and easy to find online, but the gist of it has something to do with breaking away from grandiose patriarchal-colonial ways of thinking about narrative, subjecthood and history. She's against "the ascent of man" and its privileged position in culture. (Hundert says: "continuity without resolution").

My second favourite quotation from Le Guin's essay is this: "The average prehistoric person could make a nice living in about a fifteen-hour work week." I'd prefer a zero-hour working week (in an actual sense, not this shit non-time we're saddled with in the horrid post-Fordist digitised haze of global capitalism), but it makes me happy.

Bini Adamczak has written about the idea of "circlusion" as an alternative to penetration – something to do with circling around, wrapping things up, swallowing/swaddling/enfolding them. She's talking about fucking, but sex is of course a strand of the spiderweb (or perhaps carrier-bag) of life, so she's also talking about many things. (This is something Samuel R. Delany does marvellously, his *Neveryon* books are kink-oriented cousins to Le Guin's carrier-bag thinking).

Anyway: circlusion, revolutions, recipients. Le Guin talks about "the killer story" of history/hegemony and trying to find the "life story" – a story of everyday life, but also a story which makes a claim for and about life. Her characterisation of the





killer story makes me think of the “conquering gaze from nowhere” of Donna J. Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges” which is a neat summation of the end goal of the immortality-chasing, afterlife-colonising patriarchal wizards of Le Guin’s Earthsea series. This desire to live forever as an unending, unchanging Selfhood is shown to be a denial of life, of the relational, reciprocal interconnectness of life. On the other hand, Hundert invokes an image of pollination, which makes me think of Anna Tsing’s notion of contamination (in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*). Let all things be messy, because that’s how they are. The mess is around us and in us. And we are part of the mess, and we are the mess.

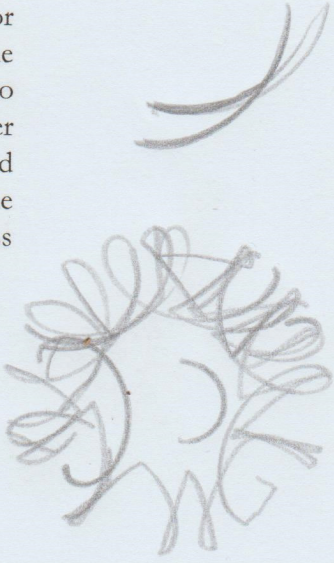
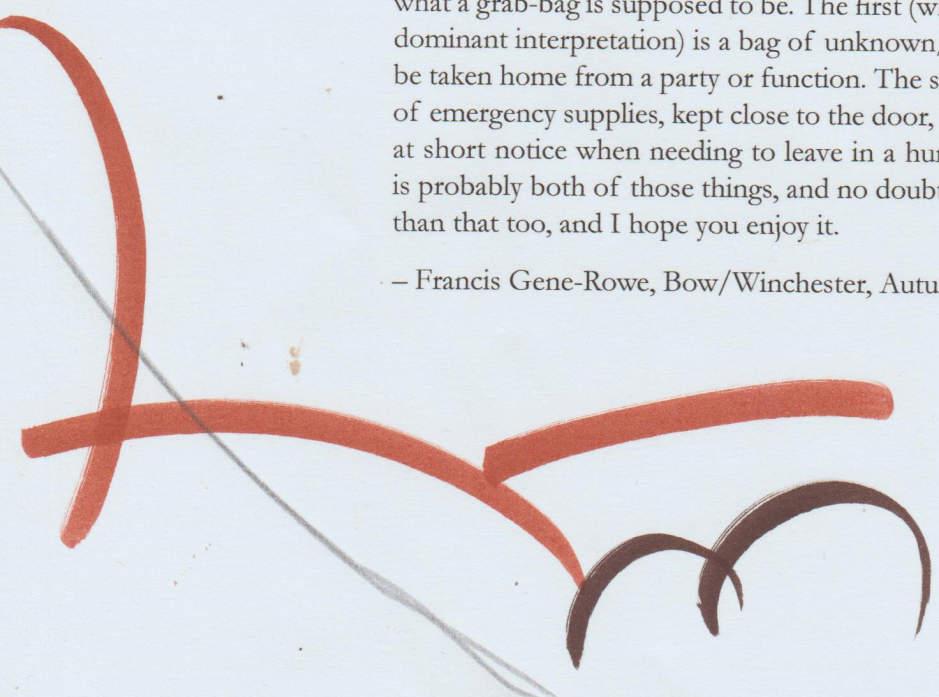
Here’s my favourite quotation from Le Guin’s Carrier-Bag piece:

“If, however, one avoids the linear, progressive, Time’s-(killing)-arrow mode of the Techno-Heroic, and redefines technology and science as primarily cultural carrier bag rather than weapon of domination, one pleasant side effect is that science fiction can be seen as a far less rigid, narrow field, not necessarily Promethean or apocalyptic at all, and in fact less a mythological genre than a realistic one.

It is a strange realism, but it is a strange reality.”

Hundert invokes the image of a “salvage-bundle,” which I like well enough. In various workshops, conversations and game design notes I’ve tended to use the term “grab-bag” as both an articulation of how I tend to think and as a description of the kind of practice I want to use to engage people and communicate with them. Having gone on Google while writing this, I’ve found two suggestions for what a grab-bag is supposed to be. The first (which seems to be the dominant interpretation) is a bag of unknown/random goodies to be taken home from a party or function. The second is a container of emergency supplies, kept close to the door, ready to be grabbed at short notice when needing to leave in a hurry. I think this zine is probably both of those things, and no doubt a lot more and less than that too, and I hope you enjoy it.

– Francis Gene-Rowe, Bow/Winchester, Autumn 2023





# Strange Realism

Words: Francis Gene-Rowe

Visuals: Erica Masserano/Francis Gene-Rowe/Daina Daugaviete