

2HB

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'These heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here'
(Joyce, 1922).

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A sheet of lacquered brown paper, cracked and crumpled into a geodesic skeleton of folds. Resting on top, a shroud of polythene sheeting, the image of the paper shape underneath becoming smudged into obscurity. The frosted blanket sitting alert and at tension on each rigid and discoloured peak, or, where freed, waving gracefully, tickled by upward drafts, its movement stealing a crisp whisper.

The quiet, flirtatious presence of the plastic and its paper counterpart bears equal tension between the seen and the unseen, the poised and the floating. At no great cost or rarity, a dust sheet cocoon, found and embodied. The material cheap and readily-available, a stark and cheerful honesty. The paper found just as readily, lying plentiful in a pile of words.

The material made the image, makes the text.

We gathered aside the cemetery. We spoke about many things. Complex ideas, infinitesimal observations. We were offered a fragment of your relationship with your grandmother. I heard her voice slowly counting in a mother tongue I did not know, yet the simple ascending numbers needed no translation. As those numbers grew I saw her laboured steps across the cobbles with you following close behind, camera in hand. It painted a more striking triangle between you, her and me, watching, than words or pigments could have quite accomplished.

There were many words, too. Lone, isolated, broken words. Words with passion and words completely dried of sentiment altogether. Guttural, primary articulation of consonants and assonance of vowels. Someone else's words, our own, a distinction unclear or quietly left unsaid. Concrete or languished, flippant or grave, heavy with surplus meaning - all was given away to the ether, a release into the air.

Elsewhere, words wove narratives and narratives bore stories and stories begged for a resolved ending, their fate left to us like Roman emperors with outstretched thumbs. Short, matter-of-fact little sentences sketched out naïve, child-like drawings. Fleeting little images of native birds, nesting, bathing, on the wing, caged momentarily in our minds' eyes.

The text made the image, makes the material.

Either found or made, at times it was silence, at times it was paying for air and at times it was a single, crystal clear thought, vibrating like a wine glass filled with water. There was shelter in the companionship, but it had grown out of respect, observations flowering from thoughtful attentiveness.

Like some unfaltering, sublime and natural conclusion, the sun was setting. Ever so slowly, the flaming circle edging closer and closer to the horizon. Disregarding any foretold warning about staring into the sun, we were mesmerised, our eyes straining to drink in the piercing light. It seemed to hover there for a long while, melting into the edge of the distant water. It was so beautiful, we took a photo. We didn't need to remember this sunset, it was like any other. What we wanted to remember was this moment that we shared, sitting together on a bench, watching the dusk. Suddenly, the sun was gone. We sat in silence as it grew colder, wondering what was yet to come.

The image made the material, makes the text.

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TRANSCRIPT FROM A READING TO BE PERFORMED FOR YOU, SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE.

A girl, wearing a taupe linen shirt and black leather skirt, lies on a stage constructed from old table-tops. Her right leg lies flat, whilst her left is bent in an arc to make an angle of 45 degrees. Her left arm is extended perpendicular to her body. In her palm is a small spider plant, turned out from a pot, surrounded by a pool of loose soil. The girl begins to speak.

Girl:

I have currently been pondering upon two questions, that are of arguably profound importance:

1. What is the difference between a script and a text?
2. What is the difference between a performance and a reading?

My idle musings have led to the following conclusion: a reading is from a text, and a performance is from a script. A reading is generally more casual, and usually involves some kind of preamble, a lengthy apology for being profound. In a performance, then, the artist must enter stony-faced, impassive to the viewer. There is no doubt more of a notion of a clearly defined stage, and you should probably take into account what I am wearing, too.

I hate preambles, so by extension I suppose I must hate readings. Let me tell you now, that despite its casual air, everything I have just said to you has been read from a script.

As you can see, I currently have a plant on my hand. Perhaps you might like to consider the significance of this fact, but then again perhaps not. For there is always the chance that I am being wilfully obscure.

With her right hand, the girl picks up a piece of paper, a single length printed from a dot-matrix printer. It is unwieldy, and difficult to arrange along her body with one hand (the other of course being occupied with holding the plant.) Finally the girl manages to arrange it so that the paper lies parallel to her torso, and begins to read from the page.

I am sitting at my desk, about to begin the task of writing. Except I am not, of course. At present, as you see me, I am lying on the floor, a spider plant in my hand. Perhaps some dirt from the plant has besmirched my clothing, but I hope this shall not happen, as this would be annoying.

This question of tenses confuses me, and caught somewhere between the act of writing and reading, I do not know where the present tense lies. I speak now of the time of writing, where I sit rigid in a wooden chair before my desk. In my stomach, the dull nausea of indigestion throbs persistently, a hideous beast crouching in a corner, waiting to attack. It is annoying, I wish to leave my desk and I cannot, cannot escape the shackles of this pervasive sensation. It pulls me down as if I have lead in my soles.

I will tell you now where I intend to visit. I think it should be a mountainous realm, dotted with lakes. Think perhaps of the scene behind the Mona Lisa, and you will not be far off. The gauze of mist is blazed upon by glorious sunshine, lending the scene a greyish, golden hue that washes to oblivion along the horizon. There is the occasional lake, glassy, dark, the deep metallic of polished chrome. These pools become focal points along the landscape, areas of sharpness in a sea of haze.

This place looks entirely natural. Perhaps some nuclear plant or electrical pylons, cement factory or satellite habitation nestles ominously behind a hill, like the creature in my stomach; or like an eel in some underwater cave, waiting to pounce on an unsuspecting clownfish. None can be seen from my lofty vantage point, but an uneasiness that is barely palpable- is it just from my stomach?- taints this otherwise perfect land.

Strange to say it is natural, as if we are so far removed from nature that the term man-made becomes its opposite rather than extension. But then, I'm hardly the first to think so.

And I cannot reach this place, held back by dyspepsia.

To reach there, I must ascend a broad crescent of stone steps. There are five, I think- no, seven. No it is no use. I cannot determine the number of steps; let us just say there are a handful. At the top of this flight of steps (I do not say stairs, note, as this implies something entirely different, something steep, indoors. What I wish to climb now is the very antithesis of those near-ladders gracing Amsterdam homes. This ascension lazily wallows in an overabundance of space, gluttinously boasting of its luxurious expansiveness). Each rise is too deep and shallow for one step, yet not large enough for two. Awkwardly, I place a foot in the centre, then bring the other to join it.

At the top of the steps are two polished stone gateposts, alabaster in hue. They are enormous, but I cannot say precisely how large. Between them is a magnificent wrought iron gate, drawn open to form a frame for the scene beyond.

Yet still I cannot get there. It is as if an ugly great line, fluorescent orange cutting through the watercolour softness, physically divides me from here. Or perhaps a searing red, turning to brown in a viscous gradient. This is the sensation across my stomach.

Beyond the gates, just beyond, lush and verdant tropical plants grow in enormous terracotta pots.

I cannot determine the details of the scene below. Each time I attempt to concentrate on one summit, it transforms before me. The landscape at first appears to be a ridged mass of sharp peaks. Yet when I try to focus upon it, I realise it is moving, undulating grotesquely, an amorphous skin rippling softly. And this because of indigestion.

* * *

- A set of traffic lights
- The processing of our tax return forms
- The interest accrued on bank accounts
- The pressing of a key that translates to a letter that's on your computer screen
- The flowing of ink from a ballpoint pen
- A television remote control

What is this list, you might ask?

I will tell you. It is a list of a series of infinitely complex systems that go largely unnoticed by us in our everyday lives; Systems that rely on either a network of persons or a technological sequence, or a mechanical device. You probably don't bother to understand how they function, but by and large you take for granted that they do, and shall continue to do so. It is only when these systems go wrong, that you will even deign to acknowledge their existence.

The body is one such system.

The man of whom I am about to speak was a disciple of Plotinus; he would in the future come to love Descartes' *Meditations*. His ideology was the very antithesis of that held by sensuous writers such as DH Lawrence: he loathed having a body. Honestly, if he could have been a brain in a jar, like some hideous cartoon science-fiction character, he would have been happy. His body, an awkward, fleshy encumbrance, was an embarrassment. Yet it was not until he was plagued by illness that he understood what an obstacle the body could be.

* * *

I understand his pain. Really, I do. I write this now with a mild case of indigestion, a strain across my midriff, taunted to a stretch of dull pain. It keeps distracting me; I cannot rest the book in which I write upon my lap, my elbows continue to graze this site of pain. Indigestion is a lead weight pulling me down to reality. I must take steps (indigestion relief tablets).

No doubt due to his limited contact with others, he had never really been ill before. The occasional cold, yes, and he too suffered from dyspepsia now and then. These might distract him, slow him in his thought processes, but they never forced him to fully interrupt his daily life.

Until he caught The Virus.

This man never discovered what illness had struck him, for he never sought medical advice. In his mind, then, this unknown contagion became The Virus, the ultimate nemesis.

After a few days of illness, I often marvel that I have survived it. How did I cope with perpetual nausea, for a start? One hour of travel sickness is vile enough. And lying in bed, writhing in pain (I'm being melodramatic, I know), for hours on end, unable to read, eat, write, was I not bored senseless by the monotony? How did I find the strength not to simply end it all?

So you see, I have forgotten. In sickness, time becomes elastic. It pullulates, stretches and contracts like the movements of a jellyfish. Boredom is not even an issue, as focus is shifted to minute sensations across one's body. A slight turn to the left- nausea is abated for a moment. Pull one's arm from under one's side to ease the pressure on one's lower ribs. Move the right leg up slightly, and bend the knee. The light drift of cool bedsheet pleasingly strokes one's bare foot. Illness becomes a set of tiny adjustments in the hope of reaching equilibrium.

I do not wish to elaborate on the unpleasant outward symptoms that the man experienced, suffice it to say long hours were passed alternating from bedroom to bathroom, and all dignity was disposed of. He hoped he would not die, and be discovered in this base state.

He felt the Virus vividly as a pan-sensorial stranglehold. It was:

-A pointed, triangular sickness across his abdomen (colour: pale chartreuse)

-A strange heaviness when he closed his jaw, feeling as though it was folding in on itself

-A whirring blur that swarmed across the back of his skull and spread into his inner ear, whenever he closed his eyes (colour: pale straw with pinpricks of Siena)

-A clamminess about the elbows

-A radial pain from eyebrows to forehead

A thickening of the tongue accompanied by a sour metallic taste (this particularly vivid, a cylinder of metallic bronze)

For six days he shifted in and out of consciousness. Then on the afternoon of day seven, he woke up. It was raining outside, he could perceive. Tentatively, he allowed his mind to wander across his body and felt: nothing.

He was cured.

The girl puts down the paper on the floor to her right. The reading has finished.

This book is open at pages eight and eleven. One leaf is missing, torn from perfect binding, now in some unknown location. Around half way up the thumb edge of page ten, where a thin darkening column permeates its length, a top lip has deposited red lipstick in a striated arc. The peak of this tangy curve partially obscures some of the printed text. On the reverse, or page nine, the lower lip has at exactly the same moment printed a slightly larger amount of make-up. Radiators are attached to cold walls, spaced regularly between windows. They are covered by machined panels, perforated with a shape that echoes the central motif of the wooden window covers outside. This simple shape turns to tessellate to allow the passage of warm air from the radiators into the room. The pattern is reflected in various surfaces. A glass made in 1872 or 1881 stands upturned so as to stop atmospheric dust collecting there. Three parts fuse; the neck, or spine of the glass joins the base, or foot, to the cup, or bowl. The buckled ellipse of the rim admits small beetles. The floor is fitted with thin square tiles of black and white stone from a place called Pruno; they are geometric slices of mountainous origin

necessary midst enormous pieces rattles third delineated casego unity slid agreeable common appearance hat scamper bean proper starry drinking drop inspection moneyed panegyrist. Cemented neatly here, they concertina in every direction under heavy bookcases, tables that are heavy too, and drapes that are heavier still. During warm days, windows are opened. Curtain fabric bellows, fanning at the bottom, so dust laps against the skirting board. The thick fabric of each curtain is compressed in the area pulled at. The lawn outside is newly mown and rarely stepped on - surrounding landscape is precipitous. Deciduous trees relay a softer impression of craggy slopes through their uppermost foliage. Exterior shutters guard the windows. Their decoration, effectively a piece missing from the long inside edge of each panel, is nominal. Its simplicity is emphasised by bright sunlight that passes through when the shutters are closed and the formation is complete. Numerous searchlights are cast through the replicated gap; they skew and slide across arbitrary objects within the room. This illumination is lost when the shutters are pushed open and the expanding silhouettes diffuse, becoming too faint to make out.

Most people have anxiety dreams about their own performance, like taking a test for a class you didn't know you were in, or being on stage and realizing that you're naked, that kind of thing. But I dream of performance art pieces that I will never accomplish, works that I fully believe are being created by friends and acquaintances and they are totally intimidating.



Number 1.

There is a thick polished wall of solid wood about the height of a door but wider, while two direct lights overhead reveal slight cracks in the outline of tightly fitted shapes. Hidden behind the wall someone starts hammering this hulking form from the back, very systematically. Tapping a different spot to every 4th note of a wonderfully slow rhythmic beat. With just enough strength, an extruded form pops forward from an otherwise smooth flat surface, sometimes it's a word, sometimes it's just half moon shapes, but I begin to see words that were already right in front of me. Certain words disappear and new ones form along the contours of the existing shapes to create new words. Tak... tak... tak... A light from above also casts shadows from these extruded forms, and these even have their own designs, spelling out more words as silhouettes onto the floor, a story is slowly revealed. Something to do with an obtrusive tree that became a weed and how it became one man's job to keep it in check. Thwak.

Number 2.

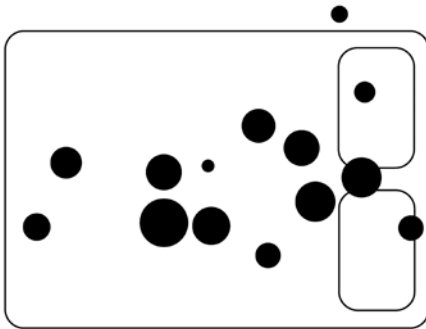
In a morbid genre of physical theatre they have invented a device that is inserted halfway into one's throat permanently that allows one to breath underwater. The performance takes place at a large swimming pool where an actor and an actress try to drown each other, but it's almost impossible.

Number 3.

In a small private room for an interactive piece, everyone is given a blood red pill and when they swallow it they momentarily become the gender and age that they are in their minds. There are extra sets of clothes so that people can fit into more appropriate clothing and there are stylists on hand, unaware of your original age, but they're here to help dress you with a smart, sharp style. But this has to be done rather quickly because it only lasts for 30 minutes and then everyone has to undress before they return to their normal size and shape or they will risk becoming suffocated by the clothes.

Number 4.

I'm convinced I'm always being recorded in bed and so all the sex I have with my girlfriend is just part of an elaborate performance document. There are stills taken when there's a moment that we feel particularly comfortable. We have no idea what our bodies look like but that's what the birds-eye view camera is for. The only other aspects of the recording, as there is no actual video, are sensors that show how much pressure we are applying with our elbows, our knees, our butts and our backs. The resulting information is uploaded onto the internet where we later rate the sex and very objective statistics can be printed out. How long did I rest on my left elbow? The longest period was 4 minutes. Which side was Rachel lying on the most? Her left side 46%. Newest configuration: fourteen points of contact, specific to just my body, the left eyebrow ridge, right hand, left knee, left and right toes.



Number 5.

A devout group of people play an intense game of hide-and-seek across the entire city. They try to find the smallest gaps between buildings but they have to be outdoors. They're all given tools to be able to scale buildings and fight off spiders and other creepy insects and they're dressed all in neon yellow reflective gear. Then at midnight, whoever isn't playing has to go home and watch from the windows, but they can use flashlights if they want to try to help the seeker. The game ends when the seeker finds just one other person. Everyone else who is hiding has to set up an art installation in the location where they were hiding and take it down after a week.

Number 6.

A girl that I envy performs almost everyday in public. One of her performances include walking down Sauchiehall transforming into someone else every fifteen seconds, like from The King of Masks, but everyone she encounters is surprised to be staring back at themselves, entranced, as if they're looking at a mirror, a parody of themselves. She uses very few details to achieve this effect from the way she can curl the corners of her mouth up or down, a small stain on the front of her shirt that appears and disappears, and a very convincing prosthetic nose. At first people don't seem to understand what's going on because it happens so fast, like someone on a bike weaving through pedestrians, making just enough eye contact to not hit anybody, but going fast enough to put you on edge, and once they pass, you might swear at them, but then you forget about it. When someone tries to point her out this gets quickly confused with the charity workers along the street. She is feeding off of those people trying to avoid looking anyone else in the eye, and she is doing just that.



Number 7.

A recent graduate leads a workshop in their kitchen: how to bake a baguette. Everyone who comes has to make at least one and they are given a specific length in centimetres that they have to try to bake it to that size. When all the bread is baked, we eat some of the ugliest loaves (but they taste the best) and the rest are left to harden. The next day the bread is taken to houses in the neighbourhood where the wrought iron fences have become broken or rusted over time and we pierce both ends of the bread onto the rest of the metal that sticks out and anchor them into place so that the wind doesn't just blow it over. But the performance is actually the act of making the bread, the rest is just something we do to mess with the neighbours.

Number 8.

There is a children's puppet show that tours all over the world from school to school. They re-enact scenes from famous prison escapes and everything rhymes and all of the props are made out of felt and paper by the kids. Even though sometimes the stories end on a down note, the moral of each story is always: "Don't get caught".

Writers' biographies

ELIZABETH HOLDSWORTH

Elizabeth Holdsworth is a writer and curator based in Leeds. She is a founding member of Millpond, a critical writing and curatorial collective, and is presently collaborating on a series of curated bookshelf exhibitions. Her writing aims to combine critical rigour with aesthetic sensibility, drawing on notions of memory and sculptural presence. She is in the process of writing a book about shacks, ghost towns and derelict buildings.

REBECCA JAGOE

Rebecca Jagoe is an artist and art writer living and working in London. She is co-editor of the art writing journal *Young Fresh and Relevant* [A Journal Interested in None of the Above Adjectives], and has been published in *Piecrust Magazine*, *Pigeon*, and *HESA Inprint*. Recent performances have included *Solaris* at the Victorian Vaults; *Pigeon Issue 2 Launch*; and *Ok-Yuh-Pah* at the Pipe Factory, Glasgow. She is a regular contributor to the website www.maudemagazine.com.

TOBY CHRISTIAN

Toby Christian lives and works in London. He graduated from the Royal Academy Schools, London in 2012, receiving the Gold Medal. In 2012 he was listed in the *24 Artists to Watch* feature in *Modern Painters* magazine. Recent exhibitions/projects include *Unseen Blows*, Seventeen, London (2012), *The Lounge*, *The Book*, *The Routine*, Waterstones Piccadilly, London (reading) (2012) and *Coletiva*, Galeria Baró, São Paulo, Brazil (2012). A book of his writing, *Measures*, will be published in 2013. More information is available at www.barogaleria.com and www.tobychristian.com.

CEDRIC TAI

Cedric Tai was born in Detroit, MI. He received a BFA from Michigan State University. In 2009 he was awarded a prestigious Kresge Fellowship in the Visual Arts and is represented by Re:View Contemporary in Detroit. Recent exhibitions include the solo show *Concept Structure Torture Survival Title* at New City Space, Glasgow 2011; *Quantified Self* at Gallery Projects, Ann Arbor 2012; and *Gwenan International*, Glasgow 2012. He was also recently published in *Tip Tap Flat: A View of Glasgow 2012*, an anthology of creative writing edited by Louise Welsh. He is part of the MFA at the Glasgow School of Art graduating in 2013.

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