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I

In perception, the useful (the good) is true.¹ Pragmatism. Madness is a form of perception alien to the community. The accusation of madness leveled at the great scientific reformers. Inability of the masses to distinguish between knowledge and perception. Perception refers to symbols. Treatment of madness in earlier days.

– Walter Benjamin

¹ The German word for ‘perception’ (*Wahrnehmung*) contains the word ‘true’ (*wahr*). – *Trans.*

‘Perception is Reading’ is a fragment written in 1917 or earlier; unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. From *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings, 2004.

Broadcast radio, by design, permeates the fabric of the everyday.

This relation to the present marks the medium's most distinctive feature, characterised by the 'liveness' of sound (even when simulated), the instant of expression, and the voice in speech. This property is deeply ambivalent, as it ties radio to histories of mass manipulation by capitalist, fascist, and otherwise authoritarian social control. Yet radio's complicity with the effects of mass media is folded within a broader story of a sonic technology that was first developed by hobbyist inventors to communicate rapidly across varying distances. Radio's prehistory as an intimate and amateurish means of two-way communication still registers in the broadcast public's fantasy of itself as a unified body of listeners, occasionally to paranoiac extremes.¹

'Perception is Reading'¹ draws upon these qualities of the radio format to

¹ As a paradigmatic example of the effects produced by radio's specific quality of 'liveness', see Orson Welles's 1939 broadcast of 'War of the Worlds'. His staging of H.G. Wells's novel about an alien invasion, largely comprised of fake news reels, was so convincing that it famously induced mass panic. While the scope of this panic itself was disputed, the episode has installed itself as a founding myth of radio's power, attesting to both its ideological uses and real effects.

test the everyday as a site of experience. It asks how experience is registered in the bodies and memories of individuals, and how individuals mediate collective histories by transmitting experience through bodies of text. It considers citation, translation, and narrative as the key mechanisms whereby experience becomes knowledge, through practices of inscription and (re)reading.

The program's script is as follows:

Each contributor selects a note from their archives in which they cite another author's work.

The note is read in three iterations:

Present:
the note as it was written.

Future:
the note as it could be.

Past:
the note as it might have been.

Across the contributors' varying interpretations of this script, two forms of subjectivity are emphasised: the individual subject of the writer, and

the collective subject of film (which perhaps does not exist as such). To my mind, they are related through a sense of desire that is equally utopian and mournful. There is something wilfully anachronistic about this dyad, writing & film, that is tied to an interest in the potential of past futures, and the promise of newness within moments that are lost to our time.

In the format of radio, this piece considers the interruptive effects of encountering fragments from the past within the present. It asks how these fragments enter our experiences, how they are given new meanings, and shared. A longer introduction would tell a story of radio's early years, defined by territorial battles over the textures and temporalities of the everyday. Rather, it will simply end by suggesting the image of a body of listeners, sharing a moment of sound.

– Kylie Gilchrist

'Perception is Reading'¹ is presented by the Berlin-based Cashmere Radio, as part of the 2017 Transmediale Festival.

The radio component streams on Cashmere Radio throughout July 2017, and is available for download through Cashmere's program archive. Please visit <https://cashmereradio.com> > Shows > Special Episodes > 'Perception is Reading'¹ to tune in.

'Perception is Reading'¹ is an iteration of *Notes*, an ongoing project that collects unpublished fragments of texts centered on a given theme. *Notes* primarily exists as a set of publications organized by various collaborators, with two collections published by Publication Studio: *Notes: On Value* (ed. Anna de Filippi, Kylie Gilchrist, and Megan Stockton, 2013) and *Notes: On Administration* (ed. Kylie Gilchrist and Megan Stockton, 2016).

women who fell
 outside history because
 they were courageous
 and uncompromising
 Hannah Wilke
 VALIE EXPORT
 and perhaps my conversation
 with Lilli last
 week

it fell outside time as if the
 absolute had flown and left
 us both
 in its orbit
 sudden and free
 la ville une toile d'araignée
 —to clear away the obsessions
 that keep you
 locked inside
 —prevent you from seeing
 the conditions of
 your reification

moments
 when you abstract from
 the world and its workings
 and you
 are able to get
 an outside view of things
 —how do you go
 back in after that?
 Pascale died in 1984 at

25

I was born in 1991
 —our times didn't

overlap
now I'm 24 and thinking
about death
a morning crowded with
adolescent
thoughts
—she was almost 26
she didn't live to see
what total
surveillance is
she knew it before
everyone
she sliced its eyes open
and the dragons she
fought were
real
they are the forces
that oppress us as we
wake
and remember our
identity our
selves our
conditions of existence
volonté de puissance—
en finir avec le
mauvais infini
machine de guerre—
you bare your
teeth
courageous as anything
and go away



Top: *November*, Hito Steyerl, 2004.

Bottom: *Le Pont du Nord*, Jacques Rivette, 1981.

Essay under construction:

In her analysis of Foucault's lectures *Mal faire, dire vrai* (1981) Judith Butler sets out a schema of the juridical formation of subjectivity by means of avowal (*aveu*) which entails a splitting of the subject between an identity that concedes to the power in place and one that necessarily retains the capacity to resist that power. What distinguishes avowal from confession is its exteriority to any regime of truth; as opposed to the simple admission of guilt, avowal requires the subject to perform herself in the context of an imperative to auto-surveillance. Butler says: 'If avowal is a performative act [...] it is one that requires a non-unitary subject, one made possible by a restructuring of the subject as a scene of internal surveillance and judgment.'¹ Therefore, in Butler's formulation, the possibility of disavowal is the precondition of avowal. The process of subjectivation performed by a structuring power engenders a resistant subjectivity even as it exercises control.

I first saw Jacques Rivette's film *Le Pont du Nord* (1981) in the fall of 2012,

¹ Judith Butler, 'Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling', European Graduate School, August 2014.

sometime around my 21st birthday (21 November). I can't remember what month it was—October or November. The film entered my mind like a compass, which I seem to follow—or which follows me—everywhere I go since then. I had recently returned to school in Upstate New York after a period of living in Paris and studying at the Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre. The convergences between the film, my life, and my thinking, operate in ways that have nothing to do with logic or chronology. It became an arsenal, a resource for me. It made me realize that there were other possibilities of life and provided me with a language of empowerment. It's as if it gave me the capacity to fight dragons others might not see but which are all too real.

Le Pont du Nord was co-written and co-conceived by its two lead actresses: Bulle Ogier and Pascale Ogier, who are mother and daughter. Pascale Ogier plays a young woman named Baptiste who wears a leather jacket, rides a motorcycle, practices karate, and lives everywhere and nowhere. Baptiste ritually slices out the eyes of faces on billboards and posters advertising products. She carries a switchblade, which she wields at the sight of eyes plastered against surfaces, and, performing a

preparation for battle, proceeds to slash them with it. We soon learn that this is specifically a means of resisting what Baptiste formulates as ‘une surveillance absolue’, whose manifestation she identifies in various forms, material and immaterial, across the landscape of post-industrial Paris, a city made unrecognizable by empty construction sites, heaps of waste, abandoned expanses. A shorter version of the film was called ‘Paris s’en va’—‘Paris goes away’.

Baptiste tells Bulle Ogier’s character, Marie, that under absolute surveillance, ‘at every second, all your words, all your gestures’ are watched. Marie is a terrorist who has just been released from prison and who is in the process of becoming re-embedded in a web of criminality, which, it will be revealed, is also a web of fatality—she is on a hit list. Baptiste locates the nodes of this web in the larger structure of pervasive surveillance; the agents of this surveillance are called Maxes. Of these men, who populate the city, observing people and collecting information, she says: ‘They watch us constantly. They want to devour us with their eyes.’ Toward the end of the film, on the Quai de l’Oise in the 19th arrondissement, where buildings are in ceaseless

demolition and rubble piles up alongside a succession of bridges receding into the distance, Baptiste pushes a Max to the ground at gunpoint and, when he tries to run away, she shoots him. Gun in hand, calm, she says, ‘One less.’

It is my feeling that Pascale Ogier identifies, in this concept of total surveillance, which has now become our reality in a way that was only beginning to take shape in 1981, a deeper form of surveillance—one whose limits are unknowable because it is both internal and external—and fights against it. To speak in Butler’s language, Baptiste might represent the force of a resistant subjectivity, an active refusal to submit to subjugation in any form—a life in ritual revolt against the imperative to auto-surveillance. These gestures of resistance open other spatiotemporal possibilities—other dimensions of experience, beyond the imposed presuppositions of constant space and time, which, as we know, the technologies of surveillance both subscribe to and reinforce.

After several years of preoccupation with *Le Pont du Nord*, I wrote the poem I read to you on January 11, 2016. Eight days earlier I had seen

Hito Steyerl's film *November* (2004) for the first time, in an exhibition of new acquisitions at the Museum of Modern Art. It was also on that day (3 January, 2016) that I first saw VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969) where, in addition to the life-size image of a vagina affixed to the crotch of her black jeans, she wears a leather jacket and holds a machine gun.

The central figure of Steyerl's *November* is Andrea Wolf, the filmmaker's best friend when they were teenagers, who was executed as a Kurdish terrorist in 1998. A large portion of *November* consists of footage from Steyerl's first film, made in 1983, which she describes as a 'feminist martial arts film', in which she, Andrea Wolf, and a third woman play a militant group who beat up and kill men. Andrea, the powerful leader of this band of women fighting for justice, wears a leather jacket, performs martial arts, and rides a motorcycle. Although it was not on my mind at the time, I must have seen in Andrea an echo of Pascale. Indeed, there is a strong shared visual language of female resistance between the two women, prefigured, perhaps, by VALIE EXPORT. Unlike the Hollywood movies both these films are inspired by and work against, neither has a

traditional narrative arc. The dialectical logic and spatiotemporal progression of a male-dominated cinema are explicitly and forcefully countered in both. There is an opposition to the all-too-common Hollywood formula according to which the actress transcends the narrative she is subjected to by the moral structure of the film, while her character ultimately succumbs to it—that is, the domination of a surveilling power over the resistant subjectivity it presupposes.

There are other, much more disturbing parallels between the two films. Steyerl rests on the point that her own character is shot and killed in her 1983 film while Andrea Wolf rides heroically into the sunset on her motorcycle, whereas in reality it would be Andrea who would die and Steyerl who would survive. In *Le Pont du Nord*, Marie is shot dead by her gangster lover Julien (Pierre Clémenti) for reasons we do not understand, and the film ends with Baptiste fighting a Max on a bridge of the Quai de l'Oise in a confrontation which perversely morphs into a karate lesson. During this sequence, we periodically see Pascale's face through a viewfinder, and while it's unclear if an attempt will be made on her life, it is also impossible to imagine the character of Baptiste, who so fully embodies

resistance, being killed. Pascale Ogier died of a heart attack on 25 October, 1984, the night before her 26th birthday. Her mother, the victim in the film, is still alive. Hito Steyerl learned of Andrea Wolf's death in early November, 1998. The divergence between the story the film tells and reality, Steyerl suggests, says something about the nature of fiction:

The truth is that only in fiction Andrea disappeared into the sunset. The truth is that only in fiction I have died for my ideals. Only in fiction have the women become stronger than men. Only in fiction were German weapons not used against the Kurdish population. Not even in fiction are the heroes innocent. And only in fiction does the good ultimately prevail.

This is the ending of the film. When I heard this again, I began to cry in a sudden, violent way that made me feel like I was vomiting tears. Why was that? Because, I think, it means that these figures, Pascale, Andrea, these courageous women who defeat all men in their paths, who struggle to shatter the manifestations of oppression and reverse the mechanisms of auto-surveillance that surround us, are just that—figures for something that still does not exist. The visual language they share—the symbols of resistance

they embody—are fragile, and they, like all figures, are not quite present; they assemble acts and gestures that form the condition of a fight that has not yet begun—that, by its figural status, is always deferring itself. Perhaps these are both, in some sense, science fiction films.

In *Le Pont du Nord*, when Baptiste comments that Marie's relationship with Julien is like a novel, Marie says, 'It's not a novel, it's real life'—to which Baptiste replies, 'Real life is a reign of terror.' The living shadow of the real casts itself across the street. The film is full of a reality no Hollywood drama could contain. But I would rather not talk about fatality.

In Steyerl's *November*, she makes a distinction between the political time of October and that of November. October is defined in Sergei Eisenstein's terms, as the era where 'the Cossaks decide to join the Russian proletarians in internationalist brotherhood during the Bolshevik revolution.' October is the time in which resistance takes the form of a unified armed struggle for freedom. It is the Russian revolution—the embodiment of Marxist-Leninist idealism. Steyerl says:

Now, we are in the period of November. In November, the former heroes become madmen and die in extralegal executions somewhere on a dirty roadside and hardly anyone takes a closer look.

November is our present. It's the time of the micropolitical, where the dream of revolution has been broken so definitively that we can only perform acts of resistance on a local scale, like tearing out the eyes of a face in an advertisement—the place of resistance has become immediate experience, the changeable space-time we live in from day to day. And resistant acts whose meanings are so circumscribed are bound to have limited effects that, once fatal, appear meaningless, even mad. 'In November,' says Steyerl, 'we are all part of the story and I am not telling the story but the story tells me.' It is a time when subjection is the condition of selfhood, and when the escape from this subjection happens in an individual way. In *Le Pont du Nord*, the accusation 'you're completely insane' is leveled twice—first by Julien against Marie, after he discovers that she has stolen a briefcase from him that contains dangerous information. Second, Marie tells this to Baptiste after she has just shot the Max. We are always at the edge of insanity in the film, yet the reality it describes is nothing if not ours.

Watching *Le Pont du Nord* again, the opening title card struck me. The only words that situate the film are these: ‘October or November 1980, already a long time ago—’. Perhaps the film takes place in a liminal space between the political realities of October and November, a space between the world where unified internationalist insurrection is possible and the world where resistance can only take micropolitical forms. We must not forget that this is a situationist film. It is a filmic illustration of Guy Debord’s *dérive*. Situationism has two sides: on one, it was an ideological force for May ’68, which fueled the revolutionary spirit of students and workers alike; on the other, it lends itself to a micropolitical praxis that effects subjective shifts—shifts in the way we experience the city and ourselves. Shifts in selfhood. It represents what may be one of the only ways to mobilize in a time when struggles for justice take place at the level of subjectivity. *Le Pont du Nord* is in this sense a document of situationism long after ’68—it implements a *dérive* practice so extreme it makes the city disappear.



Top & Bottom: *Le Pont du Nord*, Jacques Rivette, 1981.

First draft of poem written on
11 January, 2016:

Morning
the feeling of death pervades
you miss your Alice
 innocent and
 running in the maze
you miss Pascale who
 was never paralyzed by terror
 or anxiety
 who graced the
living world like
 everything
was waiting for
her
to begin
 she stepped on
 the street like
a cowboy and an oracle
 committed to surveillance
 —its destruction
 surveillance absolue
EN FINIR AVEC LE
MASSACRE DU CORPS
 she embodied all
 the ideals one
 could have
she belongs to the
 women who fell
outside history because
they were courageous
 and uncompromising

Hannah Wilke
 VALIE EXPORT

and perhaps my conversation
 with Lilli last
 week

it fell outside time
 and glowed as if the
 absolute had flown and left
 us both

within its orbit
 sudden and free

la ville une toile d'araignée
 —to clear away the obsessions
 that keep you
 locked inside

—prevent you from seeing
 the conditions of
 your exploitation
 and alienation

and reification

moments
 when you abstract from
 the world and its workings
 and you
 are able to get
 an outside view of things
 —how do you go
 back in after that?

Pascale died in 1984 at

25

I was born in 1991
 —our times didn't

overlap
now I'm 24 and thinking
about death
a morning crowded with
morose and adolescent
thoughts
—she was almost 26
she didn't live to see
what REAL
surveillance is
she knew it before
everyone
she sliced its eyes open
and the dragons she
fought were
real
they are the forces
that oppress us as we
wake
and remember our
identity our
selves our
conditions of existence
volonté de puissance—
en finir avec le
mauvais infini
machine de guerre—
you bare your
teeth
courageous and all
as anything
and go away—tu t'en vas



Octobre ou novembre 1980,
il y a déjà longtemps -

Top: *November*, Hito Steyerl, 2004.

Bottom: *Le Pont du Nord*, Jacques Rivette, 1981.

Sylvia Mae Gorelick is a poet, writer, and translator based in New York City. Her chapbooks include *Olympians, we are breathless* (Poetry will be made by all!, 2014) and *Seven Poems for Bill Berkson* (Kostro Editions, 2009). Her work has appeared in various anthologies including *In|Filtration* (Station Hill, 2016) and *For Bill, Anything* (Pressed Wafer, 2015). The University of Chicago Press published her translation of *Nietzsche's Journey to Sorrento* by Paolo D'Iorio in 2016, and her translation of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Le Livre* is forthcoming from Exact Change Press.

Citations from:

Le Pont du Nord by Jacques Rivette, 1981.

November by Hito Steyerl, 2004.

III

Nikhil Vettukattil

From *The Secret Language of Film*, by
Jean Claude Carrière, 1994:

In the years following the First World War French colonial administrators in Africa frequently put on film shows.

Their aim was of course to amuse, to entertain in the latest style, but it was also to demonstrate to subject African populations the unassailable supremacy of the white nations.

The cinema,
one recent invention among many of
the industrial West,
was the product of a historic encounter
of theatre, vaudeville, music hall, painting,
photography,

and a whole
series of technical
advances. As such, it
helped sing the
praises of the
white
middle-class
civilisation
that had given it
birth.

A sheet was stretched between two posts,

the mysterious device was carefully set up,

and suddenly,
out in the dry night of
the African bush,

moving pictures
appeared.

African notables and religious leaders invited to these performances could hardly refuse to attend: such a breach of manners would surely be interpreted as unfriendly or even rebellious. So they and their retainers came.

But since these dignitaries were for the most part Muslim, a long and strict tradition forbade them to depict the human face and form, God's creation. Did that ancient prohibition also apply to this new kind of representation?

Some believers sincerely thought so.

They diplomatically accepted official invitations

shook French hands
and took the seats
reserved for them.

When the lights went down
and the first beams flickered from the
curious apparatus
 they shut their eyes
 and kept them shut
 throughout the
 performance.

They were there and not there.

 They were present
 but they saw
 nothing.

I have often wondered what

 invisible
 soundless
 film

was shown during those few short
hours.

What went on behind those eyelids?
 Images pursue us even
 when our eyes are closed.
 We can neither escape
 nor obliterate them.

In the case of the Africans,
what was seen?
By whom?
And how?

And sometimes I think we ourselves are not very different from those observant Muslims when we go to see a film.

Unlike them we keep our eyes open in the dark, or we think we do.

But do we not harbour deep within us some taboo or habit or faculty or obsession that blinds us to all or part of the audiovisual band that flickers fleetingly before us?

How many times could we say, of ourselves or of others, that a film has not been seen, or truly seen?

For many reasons, some of which are unclear and some we cannot admit to, we see imperfectly.

We refuse to see
or else we see something else.

There is in every film
a region of shadow,
a stockpile of the
not-seen.

It can be put there by its authors, knowingly and deliberately. And it can be brought there during a performance by a particular spectator

But I cannot see it
more or less slowly
than the people
around me.

We are travelling on the same train.

'Cosmopolitan - Universal - Cinema'
Performance script:

SPEAKER A:

There is always a difference between dreams and reality, which becomes clearer as the superficial contrast diminishes. The difference in this case was reflected in architecture, which is, in itself, a reciprocal mirroring of what has already been built and what will be built eventually. The all-important bridge between these two reflections is provided by a third term: the unbuilt.

The unbuilt is characteristic of those arts whose realisation requires the remunerated work of many people, the purchase of materials, the use of expensive equipment, etc. Cinema is the paradigmatic case: anyone can have an idea for a film, but then you need expertise, finance, personnel, and these obstacles mean that ninety-nine times out of a hundred the film doesn't get made. Which might make you wonder if the prodigious

bother of it all—which technological advances have exacerbated if anything—isn't actually an essential part of cinema's charm, since, paradoxically, it gives everyone access to movie-making, in the form of pure daydreaming. It's the same in the other arts, to a greater or lesser extent.

And yet it is possible to imagine an art in which the limitations of reality would be minimized, in which the made and the unmade would be indistinct, an art that would be instantaneously real, *without ghosts*.

* * *

SPEAKER B:

In 1846, Having had his precise attention drawn to the precise determination of the distance between the stars and the earth (and the amount it takes for their light to reach the earth), the jurist Felix Eberty published his work *The Stars and the History of the World*. He rightly supposed that—given ideal conditions for observa-

tion—a ray of light that had left the earth on Good Friday in the year 30 A.D. would still be moving away from us across the cosmos: which means that all of prehistory is stored in the universe in tracks of light. Thus the entire history of the world is travelling through the cosmos as *moving sequences of images* (Eberty did not know the word cinema)

This conclusion, according to Eberty, could also be reversed. Assuming an observer had absolutely sharp vision he would be able to watch here and now the events of that far-off historical time by looking at *antique light* arriving from a celestial body 2,000 light years away. Space is an ‘eternally indestructible and unerring archive of images of the past.’ And Eberty added that concepts such as omniscience and omnipresence thereby “attained a previously unknown clarity and transparency.”

* * *

C: Light was all business
 Light was full speed
 when it got interrupted.

A: Interrupted by what?

C: When it got tangled up
 and broke
 into opposites
 broke into brand new
 things.

A: What kinds of things?

C Drinking Cup

B: *“Thinking of you!*
 Convenience Valet”

A: How could speed take shape?

*

B: Hush!

C: Do you want me to start over?

*

C: The fading laser pulse
 Information describing
 the fading laser pulse
 is stored
 is encoded
 in the spin states
 of atoms.

God
is balancing his checkbook

God is encrypting
his account.

This is taking forever!

* * *

A:

In 1923, Albert Einstein wrote an introduction to a new edition of Eberty's writings. He wrote that this little book presents 'on the one hand a critical attitude to the conventional concept of time... and on the other it also shows how the theory of relativity, itself often accused of leading to bizarre conclusions, can in fact save us from some very strange ones.' Einstein is here referring to the fundamental assertion of the special theory of relativity that a traveller in time cannot overtake a light wave because the speed of light remains constant.

Einstein's introduction was read at a conference of astrophysicists and philosophers in Hono-

lulu. In a paper countermanding this argument, the astronomer Andreas Küppers from Harvard pointed out that the latest discovery, namely that of *Negative Energy* (which flows in the opposite direction to gravitational pull), relativizes the barrier described by Einstein to a Cosmic Universal Cinema. A ray of negative energy in fact could very well return information in the opposite direction to that of a ray of light, albeit not in the form of photons. And so now the only problem stopping us from realizing Eberty's idea is that we can currently neither see nor decipher Dark Energy.

It is possible that the perception of dark energy will require an even more subtle method of perception in the *universal cinema of the cosmos*. While cosmic perception is indeed directed at large and remote objects it uses information that is only 'visible' in the smallest of dimensions, often folded and rolled up...

'I heard you twice the first time.'

Audio section, comprised of various film clips.

Duration: 4.35 min.

Nikhil Vettukattil is an artist and writer based in London. Recent exhibitions include 'Dream Works' at Lethaby Gallery, London (2016) and '*Cosmopolitan – Universal – Cinema*' at Close-Up, London, and the Arnolfini, Bristol (2016).

'*Cosmopolitan – Universal – Cinema*' was performed by Javon Bennett, Ana Berkenhoff and Tanya Singh.

Sound design for 'Perception is Reading' by Stan Jordanov.

www.freedomfrominformation.net

Citations from:

Present:

The Secret Language of Film by Jean-Claude Carriere, 1994.

Future:

'The Cosmos as Cinema' in *Cinema Stories* by Alexander Kluge, 2007.

Ghosts by Cesar Aira, 1990.

'The Accounts' by Rae Armantrout.

Past:

'*I heard you twice the first time.*'

Audio clips from various films.

IV

Mira Mattar

From *The Sacred in Everyday Life*
by Michel Leiris, 1938:

It is not a question of defining my scale of values—with whatever is of gravest importance to me, most sacred in the ordinary sense of the word, at its summit. Rather, it is a matter of searching through some of the humblest things, taken from everyday life and located outside of what today makes up the officially sacred (religion, fatherland, morals). It is the little things that are required to discover what features would allow me to characterise the nature of what is sacred for me, and help establish exactly the point at which I know I am no longer moving on the level of the ordinary (trivial or serious, pleasant or painful) but rather have entered a radically distinct world, as different from the profane as fire from water.

...it was the very secrecy of our meetings that was most clearly marked by the sacred. Granted that the rest of the family knew we were there, but behind the closed door they did not know what we were talking about. There was

something more or less forbidden in what we were doing, which, moreover, brought us scoldings when we stayed shut up in there too long. [...] There it was, also, that we felt the most cut off, the most separate from everyone else, but also the closest to each other, the most shoulder-to-shoulder, the most in harmony, in this embryonic secret society that we two brothers formed.

I want to speak of certain events of language, of words in themselves rich in repercussions, or words misheard or misread that abruptly trigger a sort of vertigo at the instant in which one perceives that they are not what one had thought before. Such words often acted, in my childhood, as keys, either because surprising perspectives were opened through their very resonance or because, discovering one had always mutilated them, suddenly grasping them in their integrity somehow seemed a revelation, like a veil suddenly torn open or some outburst of truth.

‘Soft Close’, excerpt from a short story published in *The Arrow Maker*, Issue 2, in 2017:

Obedient, green, this grass is in squares. White picket fences embarrass the space in American here on London’s grey-green southwestern hem. A whole terrace twitches with heat. Along red brick grid trellises begging for roses or heavy with them. Lazy sprays of water arc in unison from yellow lawn sprinklers, saving the grass from the ravages of summer. No one here wants to see signs of burning or of having burned. From time to time, the men must remember to reposition the sprinklers else there will be ugly dry patches tattooed on lawns come autumn.

Through the rainbowing arches dart children—gleeful, water dappled—while parents, from behind ’30s bay windows framed durably in pebble-dash, glance. The tarmac too is glistening, heat coaxing it back to its first viscosity. Little waves feather up from it for our eyes to trip on. In silent black stretches it muscles towards town. 16.4 miles west to Charing Cross.

But our skins lay cool still naked
against the black and white tiles behind
her mother's locked bathroom door.

Cars hum sometimes by. Windows
closed, AC blasting. Rabidly excited to
at last use the dial they paid extra for,
drivers are filled with a certitude so
total they'd have paid triple for the
feeling alone. (A rare feeling is almost
as good as a new one.) It lasts until the
evening sun lengthens slim dinner's
shadows—it is portion control not fear
of carbohydrates that devastates this
decade's feeding times. In the cars
children gripe. The passions of parents
have condensed into desiring only, and
with total erotic ferocity, to reach back
and smack. This is what becomes of
yearning. Cars exceed their occupants
in singularity. Their special features
are recited lovingly and often.

One year all the men agreed once and
for all to wear their trousers below and
not above their paunches. A great
white sigh moved across like a holiday.
This, and having had no direct experi-
ence of war, was the only thing separ-
ating them from their fathers. So a
chasm happened, shallow as it was
wide. What were men?

Meanwhile the women. Fermenting

softly at card games, incendiarily disappointed, they press each other's feet under the table with the tenderness of birds regurgitating worms for their young.

All are nervous and only nearly relaxed. So much they want it to be like the TV in their hearts, tuned to California. Sunshine is normal, they repeat, secretly packing jumpers. There is no revving or pool sound or teenage trill with drama. Differently shaped teens instead crouch huffing lighter fluid and fingering each other behind the petrol station. Laced with vodka and Coke, Marlboro Light smoke threading the usual air, black eyeliner and tights operatically laddered—they weekend. Beneath the concrete overpass shit graffiti. Just tits dicks and phone numbers.

The bugs are hot and tired. The birds are hot and tired. The bugs on the birds are hot, tired. The chain link fences flanking the water treatment facility beyond our permissible limits are glinting and flashing. Stereos and furniture bits and video tapes at the dump wilt. Puddles too stagnant to psychadelicise their oil. Beneath algae fish gasp. Little stirrings, quickly dampened.

The sun goes earlier and earlier.

A distant bark—sanctioned noise against the screen. In a doorway a hand drying on an apron's corner. Pale green chirping creatures exhale coolly in the grass. Everything is a boring American painting, a fragment made total, dull with big meaning.

Thus, suburbia. For whose benefits are its patterns?

Sunday afternoon.

Parents, everywhere.

But we are nothing yet. Blanks for projected innocence. Not mother or wife or girlfriend or teenage girl budding suddenly visible. Bearing it cleverly we move unseen, able to skirt pornographically around each other. Smooth holeless and speaking in tongues. Our backs cool against the black and white tiles behind her mother's locked bathroom door. Our fingers, blue tipped, intertwined.

Doing the dishes her mother is gladder by the plate they'd escaped here. Each item happily washed adds value. To us her face is mellow as our TV moms' and we as sassy and rich as

their daughters. Our hair as sleek and crimpable, raised above this lamentable frizz. Truly though it is relief not serenity that washes across her mother's features. This home's cruelty is softer than the last home's cruelty. It is the higher distribution of certainty that makes the weather here tolerable. A slur in the end does not penetrate a body. And it is nice, after all, to be able to plan your own death. Information is a body wrapped in a flag and raised above the heaving crowd. Do our parents weep more regularly than our friends' parents weep? Or is it always with the same abjection that infants view this? We do not enjoy missing Saturday morning TV only in order to better understand the cadences of their sorrows.

Her father is napping.

All the fathers are napping!

We watch a buzzing fly's strange geometry from the floor up. We imagine and envy its agency. See, autonomy is visible. Is it moving along the only available path, inscribed by its mute genetics – or trying to escape? Well. It rests occasionally, folding its iridescent wings around itself. Relief. Happiness. As though there were a difference.

Line drafts from 'Soft Close':

Outside, the grass is in squares.

Outside, the grass is in obedient green squares.

Outside, the grass is in squares, obedient and green.

The grass outside is in squares.

Obedient and green, the grass is outside.

The grass is outside, obedient and green.

Trellises grid along red brick or pebbledash encouraging the flowers.

Trellises grid along pebbledash encouraging flowers.

Roses are encouraged along red brick by gridded trellises.

And along the red brick grid trellises encouraging the roses.

And along the red brick grid trellises encouraging white roses.

Also in squares the trellises gridding tediously along red brick begging the roses.

Lazy arcs of water spray from yellow lawn sprinklers preserving/saving the grass from the devastations of summertime.

Lazy sprays of water arc from yellow lawn sprinklers saving the grass from

summer's devastations.

From yellow lawn sprinklers arc lazy sprays of water saving the grass from summer's devastations.

Unless owners/dads/fathers/men/the father remember to occasionally reposition the sprinklers, not all the grass will be saved. Lawns will be tattooed with ugly dry patches in memoriam of sprinklers and hot days, that scarred patch where nothing grows.

And unless fathers remember to occasionally reposition them the lawns will be tattooed with ugly dry patches, scarred patches of dead [for autumn]. Unless the fathers remember to occasionally reposition the sprinklers there will be ugly dry patches tattooed on the lawns come autumn.

Children dart giggling through the arcs of water.

Other children dart gleefully through the lazy rainbowing arcs, giggling. And giggling through the rainbowing arcs are water dappled and gleeful children.

Through the rainbowing crescents small children dart gleefully, cool beads dappling their skin.

Our mostly bare bodies are cool against the black and white tiles of the

locked bathroom.

But our mostly bare bodies lie stretched cool against the black and white tiles of her mother's locked bathroom.

But our skins lay cooler still naked against the black and white tiles behind her mother's locked bathroom door.

The tarmac too is a glistening body/thing, like the heat's reversing/coaxing it back to its first viscosity/it to its original slick liquid state/liquidity/viscosity/the heat tempting it back towards its first viscosity.

Its silent black stretches muscling/muscle towards town [in ligaments]. Tarmac glistens and is silent in hot curved stretches, little waves of heat feather[ing] up from it for our eyes to trip on.

Cars hum [by] occasionally by.
Windows closed, AC blasting.
Closed windows, AC blasting.
Excited to get finally to use the dusty little dial they paid that much extra for.

One year/All at once the men/the/our fathers agree once and for all to wear their khakis/trousers above and not below their paunches and this is the

only thing which separates them from their fathers.

One year, all our fathers agreed/decided once and for all to wear their khakis/trousers above and not below their paunches.

Differently shaped teens instead crouch huffing and fingering each other behind the petrol station. Instead:/there is huffing and being fingered behind the petrol station, vodka and coke, Marlboro lights, laddered tights, pallor, black eyeliner.

But we are neither/nothing yet, blanks for [projected] innocence.

But we are nothing yet, just blanks for projected innocence.

But we are neither. We are nothing, not mother, not wife, not teenaged girl suddenly budding visible.

Nothing, not mother or wife or teenage girl suddenly budding visible.

Bearing it cleverly to skirt pornographically into each other.

We bear it cleverly. We move invisible and pornographic around each other.

Innocence makes us unseen.

A distant bark, sanctioned noise against the screen, a hand drying on an apron, padding quietly because everyone is napping.

In a doorway, a hand drying on the
apron's corner.

Barking in the distance, just to give
some atmosphere.

A fly flies in triangles buzzing. We
watch it from the floor up. Marvelling
at the geometry, at the agency.

We see it as agent and are filled to-
gether with envy.

A fly flies in triangles buzzing. We
watch it from the floor marvelling at
the geometry.

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PDFs of *The Arrow Maker*, Issue 2 are available on request. Please email miramattar [at] gmail [dot] com.

Citation from:

The Sacred in Everyday Life by Michel Leiris, 1938.

Perception is Reading¹:

Radio program presented in July 2017
by Cashmere Radio.

Sound produced by:
Cashmere Radio, with
Giacomo Gianetta, Daniel
Gottlieb, & Lukas Grundmann.

Booklet printed in 2017. Typeset in
Big Caslon and Adobe Caslon Pro
Italic, using Adobe InDesign.

Design by:
Kylie Gilchrist.

Contributions by:

Sylvia Mae Gorelick
Mira Mattar
Nikhil Vettukattil, with sound
design by Stan Jordanov.