
EDITION #9
SO FI ZINE
a sociological fiction zine
EDITION #9
SO FI ZINE
a sociological fiction zine
EDITION #9
SO FI ZINE
a sociological fiction zine

SO FI ZINE
EDITION #9

JUNE 2021

CREATED & EDITED BY
ASH WATSON

WITH GUEST EDITOR
SUJATHA FERNANDES

PUBLISHED BY
FRANCES ST PRESS

ISSN 2209-3028

SOFIZINE.COM
#SOFIZINE





EDITORIAL
ASH WATSON

I am working on some new fiction. It feels like trying to make my way around a completely dark room until I know the space so well it's as if I've turned on a light. The details are coming to me. I can feel the worn carpet on the floor, the coolness of a small wooden table that's pressed against one wall, and what the sun feels like when the wind blows the trees around outside. My characters are also hidden in these places, wearing the carpet down and hovering by the window.

This edition called for submissions that play with voice and place, and consider the condition under which stories are told. Many of the fiction writers I love make these elements the heart of their creative work. In their stories there aren't mere backdrops, but settings and



characters are mutually constitutive in a buoyant and ballooning way. They also weave metanarratives throughout, challenging and experimenting with the affects of storytelling without crafting a divide or distance from the central story itself.

The writers in this edition also centre these narrative relations. Throughout, the pieces illuminate how we are made in and make up many places, big and small: a carpark outside a supermarket, a cold pond, a cafe, a workplace, a series of living rooms. They show that what adjoins voice and place is perspective.

CONTENTS

2 Editorial
Ash Watson

7 Editorial
Sujatha Fernandes

11 This is just to say
Nicole Brown

12 Ridgeland, South Carolina
J.E. Sumerau

17 Pond
Charlotte Bates and Lily Kroese

20 The Journal of Simeon Collins - Entry 74
John-Paul Smiley



CONTENTS

25 The Brownes of Bridgeville (Part I)
Joseph Cleary

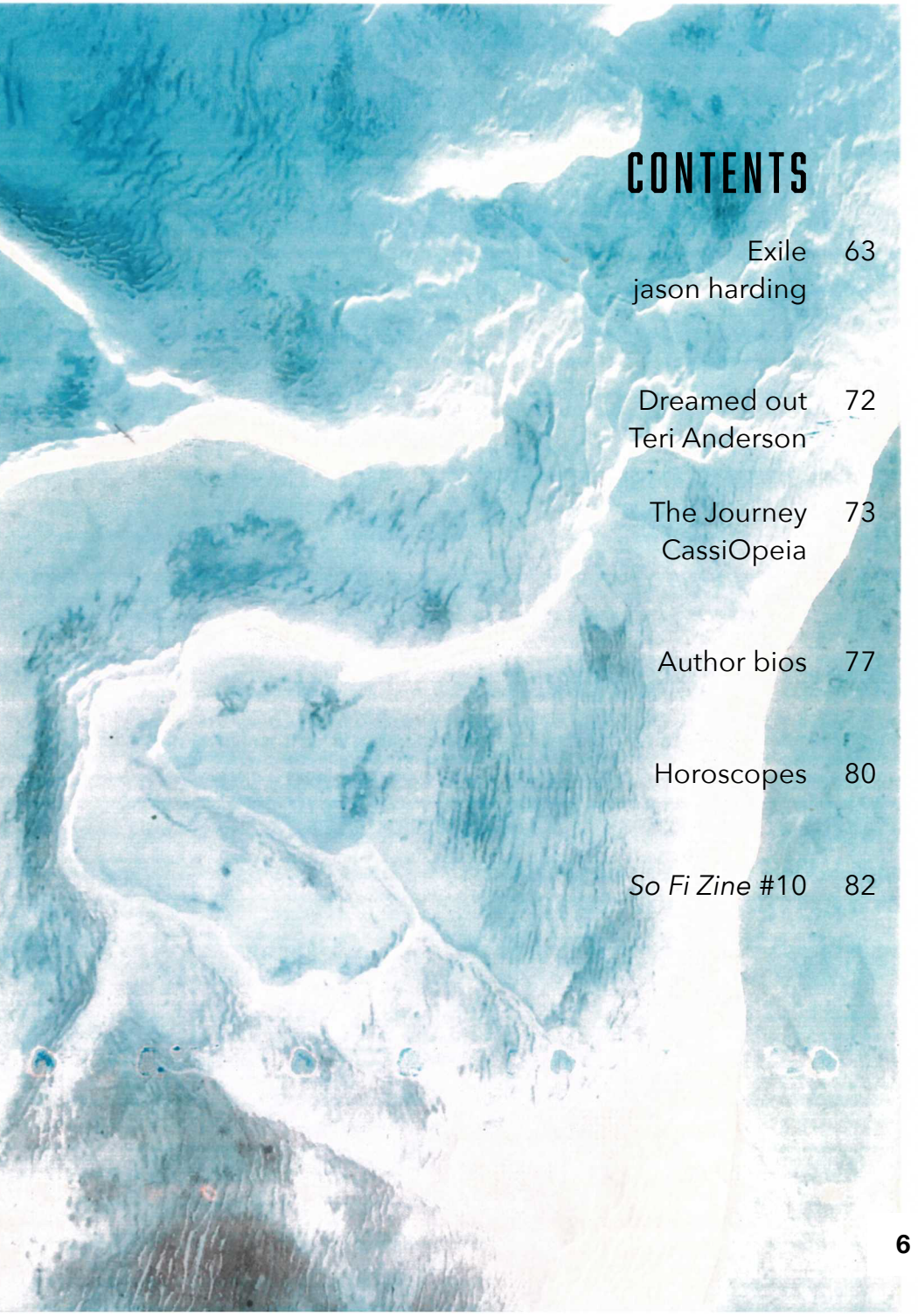
32 Breathe
Leanne Downing

39 To the Parsonage
Ian C Smith

43 The Brownes of Bridgeville (Part II)
Joseph Cleary

50 Women can have it all
Mardi Wilson

55 Lying down, we take a stand: The interwovenness of stories in the rags of the rugs
Erika Wall, Jonny Bergman and Jens Ljungdahl



CONTENTS

Exile 63
jason harding

Dreamed out 72
Teri Anderson

The Journey 73
CassiOpeia

Author bios 77

Horoscopes 80

So Fi Zine #10 82

GUEST EDITORIAL
STORYTELLING

SUJATHA FERNANDES

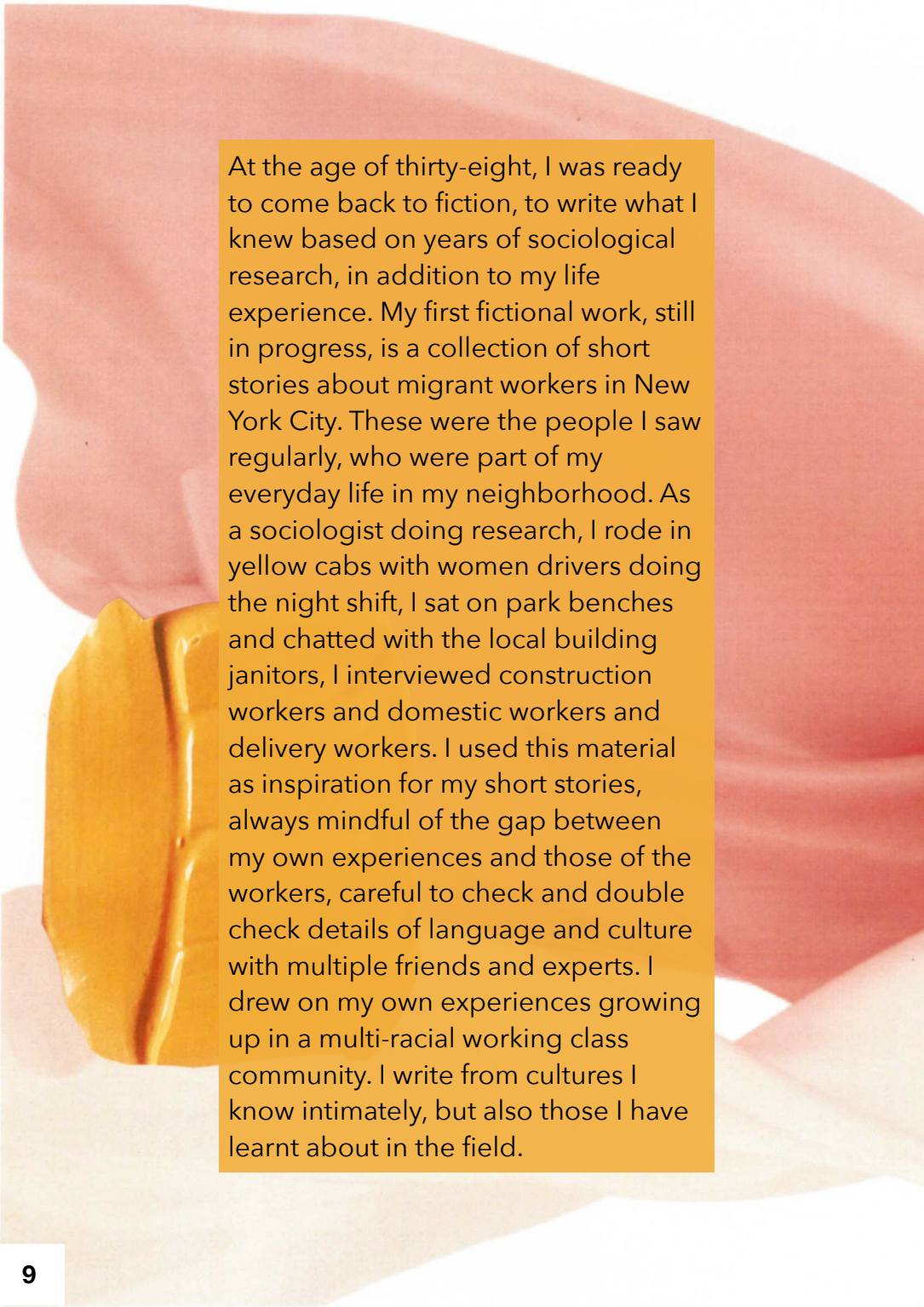
Fiction writers are often encouraged to "write what you know." This is a useful guide for producing compelling and deeply resonant texts. It often means writing from one's own experiences or location. This has become more relevant in an era of growing attention to the ways in which white writers have appropriated the experiences of non-white communities to produce salacious or stereotyped representations that will sell to white audiences. The example of *American Dirt*, a sensationalist novel about a family on the run from drug cartels in Mexico is the most noted example of this genre, but it is only the tip of the iceberg in a literary field in which recent studies have shown authors are predominantly white.

As a result of the many voices that have been speaking against such harmful cultural appropriation, there has been a flourishing of non-white writers producing representations of themselves and their own communities that stay true to their experiences. This is helping to broaden the field of literature, of who gets to see themselves represented in literature, and how non-white people are portrayed in literary culture.

I mention this as a starting point, that first and foremost literary culture needs to expand to make space for non-white writers who have traditionally been excluded to write about their own lives and experiences. And within that, I think there is room for us to ask also, could "writing what you know" be expanded to mean writing what we know from our own experiences *and* what we research as sociologists?

I was a fiction writer before I became an academic. But the reason I chose to pursue a PhD in the field of social sciences rather than in creative writing was because I wanted to write about more than the material of my own life. I was not compelled to write a coming-of-age novel or a second-generation migrant story. I was twenty-four years old when I started my PhD, and I wanted to experience the world, to travel, and expand what I knew before writing fiction.

Over the next fourteen years, I followed an academic career in sociology that allowed me to migrate from Australia to the United States and find a job. As a sociologist, I have done field research and written about the lives of those on the margins – Black, Indigenous, and migrant peoples. I have lived and worked in India, Cuba, and Venezuela, both in rural areas and in the cities of Chicago, New York, and Sydney.



At the age of thirty-eight, I was ready to come back to fiction, to write what I knew based on years of sociological research, in addition to my life experience. My first fictional work, still in progress, is a collection of short stories about migrant workers in New York City. These were the people I saw regularly, who were part of my everyday life in my neighborhood. As a sociologist doing research, I rode in yellow cabs with women drivers doing the night shift, I sat on park benches and chatted with the local building janitors, I interviewed construction workers and domestic workers and delivery workers. I used this material as inspiration for my short stories, always mindful of the gap between my own experiences and those of the workers, careful to check and double check details of language and culture with multiple friends and experts. I drew on my own experiences growing up in a multi-racial working class community. I write from cultures I know intimately, but also those I have learnt about in the field.



My second fictional work is a novel-in-progress about my ancestors who were forced to migrate from Goa to Karnataka in the eighteenth century, and were taken into captivity during the colonial wars of that era. This novel has taken a tremendous amount of historical and sociological research. But the portraits of place and culture are written from my childhood memories of rural Karnataka, interviews with my aunties and uncles, and the novel draws on my own experiences of friendship, marriage, and child-rearing gathered over a lifetime.

Writing what you know can be expanded through sociological research to take on topics and encounters beyond our own, always critically interrogating how our innate biases and structural location may impact our writing. The research I have done on popular Christianity in Venezuela, multi-racial working class movements, migrant workers, and labor politics all inform the fiction that I write and make it possible for me to extend into these fields. Sociology can help to sharpen one's tools as a fiction writer and make available materials to write with and beyond the constraints of experience and biography.



This is just to say

Nicole Brown

I have taken
the thoughts
you voiced in
our meeting

and which
you were probably
saving
for writing

Forgive me
they were ingenious
so noble
and so bold

Ridgeland, South Carolina

J.E. Sumerau

"Welcome to PJ's," the usual middle aged brunette says. "What can I get you?"

I order the almond milk latte you call fancy.

I look out the window.

I got here first.

I wonder if you took the Interstate. I hope you took highway seventeen. The traffic out of Charleston can be brutal on the best of days. I know what time your last class ends. I know how the sunlight reflects off the hood of your Volkswagen. You'll be here soon. You'll have stories about the students in your public health classes. You'll have gossip about your co-workers at the College of Charleston. We'll cover the usual topics.

I drove out of Statesboro after my last class.

I teach sociology and drive a Honda. Some of my students are learning about Du Bois this week. Others are figuring out how to conduct interviews. The rest of Georgia Southern is headed to the carnival on the edge of town. I'm sitting in our PJ's in Ridgeland, South Carolina, the reservation information for the Quality Inn stored in my phone.

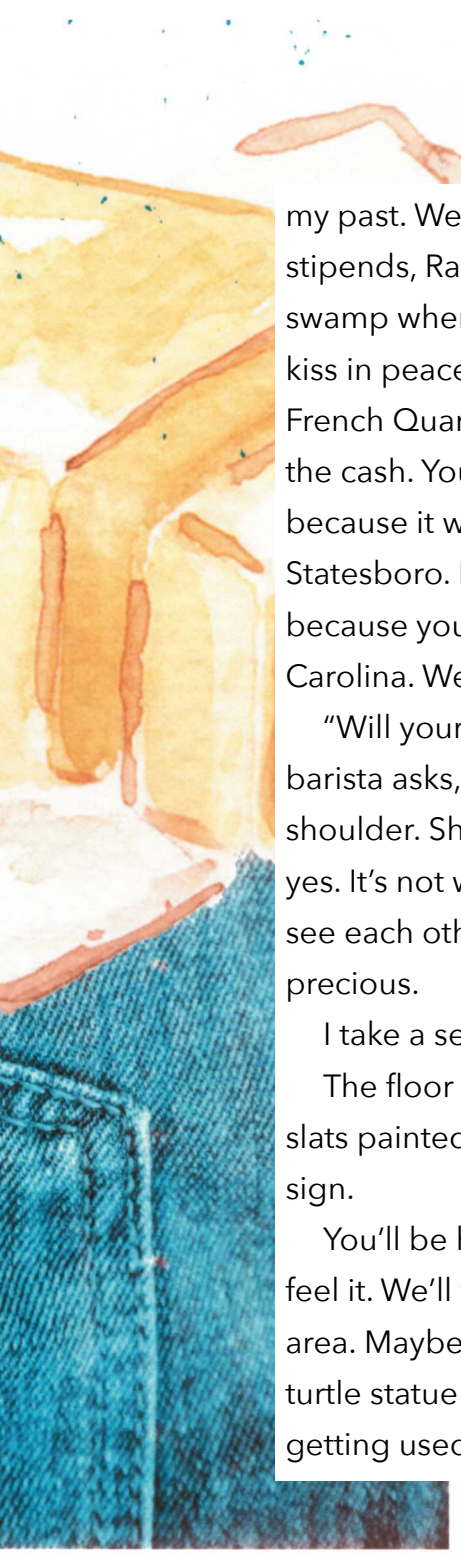
We each drive an hour and a half.

That was important.

We meet at the PJ's each time.

That is special.

You come from the private college. I come from the public one. It was the other way around when we met. You arrived in New Orleans with a master's in hand, a coat from the state school in South Carolina, and memories of Sloan College and the Horseshoe on the tip of your tongue. I was already entrenched at Tulane, one year shy of a doctorate, memories of the well-kept grounds of Vanderbilt drifting through



my past. We built a life on graduate stipends, Ramen noodles, and a bar in the swamp where girls like us could dance and kiss in peace. We went to the PJ's in the French Quarter whenever we could spare the cash. You took the job in Charleston because it was close to my job in Statesboro. I took the job in Statesboro because you wanted to go back to Carolina. We found Ridgeland by accident.

"Will your friend be joining you," the barista asks, brown hair just past her shoulder. She hands me my latte. I tell her yes. It's not worth the fight. We only get to see each other on weekends. Time is precious.

I take a seat on the porch outside.

The floor is made of purple wooden slats painted to match the coffeehouse sign.

You'll be here any minute. I can almost feel it. We'll walk over to the downtown area. Maybe we'll take pictures by the turtle statue like we did when we were just getting used to being called professor in

NOTES

our separate cities, on the workdays between visits. Maybe we can have dinner on the patio at Fiddlers. You said something about fried pickles on the phone last night. I could use a low country boil. You talked about trying the oysters last time.

We could just get takeout and check into the Quality Inn.

We have all day tomorrow.

We can take the thirty minute drive to Beaufort. We can look at the old houses and roam through the thrift shops. We can have lunch with Winter. She teaches at the University of South Carolina campus over there. She moved here just after we did, the next market year. She seems happy. We hope she is. We could swing by the Magnolia Bakery, for you, or the Chocolate Tree, for me. Maybe we'll just grab ice cream from Southern Sweets and take a walk in the park.

As long as we're together.

As long as we can be.

We'll go back to our respective colleges Sunday evening.



I watch you pull into the gravel parking lot.

You wave through the windshield. Your curls are flowing, and those new sunglasses look better than they did in the pictures. There is a new sticker on your bumper. It looks like a Palmetto Rose. We'll be in your apartment in Charleston next weekend. You said there is a River Dogs game you just can't miss. You park beside my car. I watch you stretch. The week after next, we'll be at my bungalow in Statesboro. We have tickets to see Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit. I hope they play "Outfit." You hope they play "Flying Over Water." The same rush shudders its way through my body as we embrace.
Ten years together, too many towns to count, I miss your smell when we're apart.

We'll round out the month back here, but maybe we'll stay over in Beaufort next time.

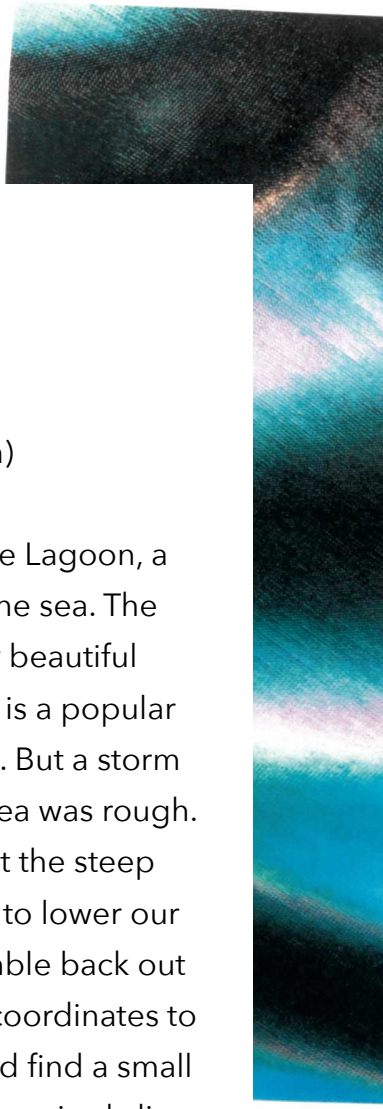
Work life balance.

Dual Careers.

Academic life.

We'll figure it out.

We always do.

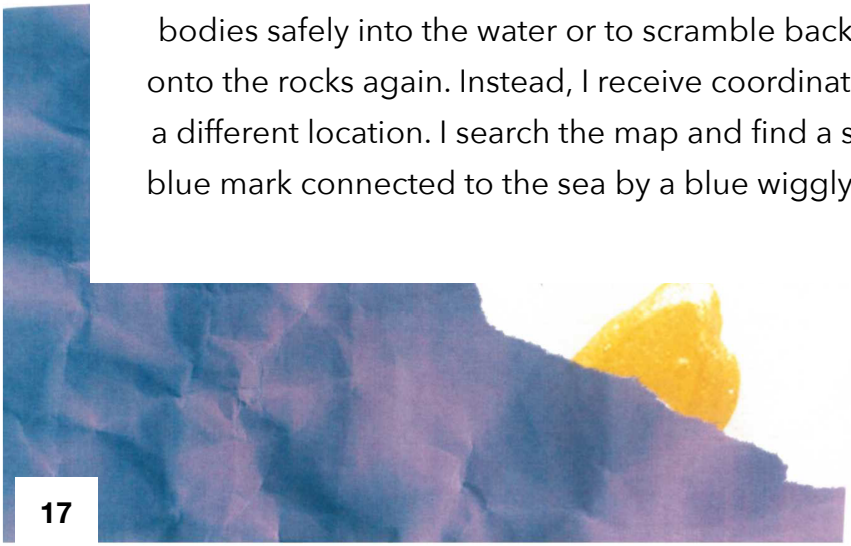


~

Pond

Charlotte Bates (story)
Lily Mae Kroese (illustration)

We were supposed to swim at the Blue Lagoon, a former slate quarry now flooded by the sea. The name alone is alluring. Bordered by beautiful beaches and craggy rocks, the lagoon is a popular spot for cliff diving and wild swimming. But a storm had blown over the weekend, and the sea was rough. It would be too dangerous to attempt the steep decent down the cliff face, too difficult to lower our bodies safely into the water or to scramble back out onto the rocks again. Instead, I receive coordinates to a different location. I search the map and find a small blue mark connected to the sea by a blue wiggly line.







Sea foam agitated by wind and waves floats through the cold grey air and lands on the rippling surface of the pond. Thirteen women are gathered at its edge, chatting and stripping and leaving piles of clothes, tins of cake and hot thermos flasks on the soggy grass. The pond feels exposed and the wind chills the swimmers bodies, raising goose bumps on their naked arms and legs. We all agree that on this blustery January day the pond is uninviting. Woolly hats and swimming caps are pulled on, and two women stand at the water's edge, offering their hands as a makeshift ladder.

Nobody wants to swim. But one by one, the swimmers cross the threshold into the water. Stepping into the brown silt with resolve and a polite 'thank you ladies' shortly followed by a series of loud expletives. Shrieking and swearing fill the pond as the cold water rises up the swimmers bodies, enveloping all but their heads. I hold back, observing the scene from the other side of the threshold. No normal human would do this. But within a few minutes the swearing has turned to laughter, and the bobbing heads are lit up with bright eyes and smiles. Submerged in cold water, bodies, fears, pain and sadness dissolve like the organic matter that floats in giant bubbles on the pond's surface.

~



The Journal of Simeon Collins - Entry 74

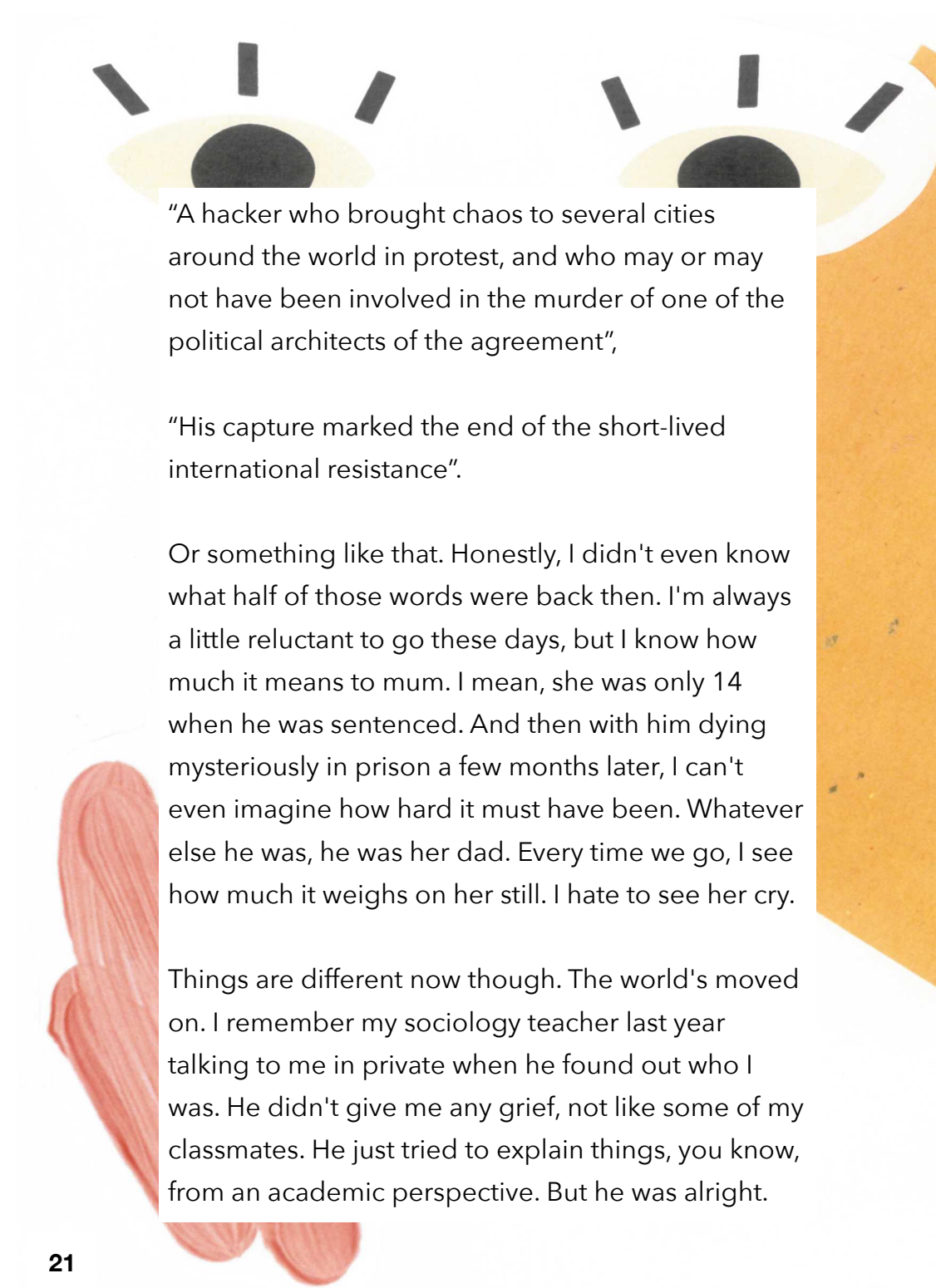
John-Paul Smiley

Saturday October 27th 2125

We went to the museum again this morning. It wasn't very busy. Down that long, winding corridor to the display case now in the far corner of the room. Grandad's jacket looked shinier today. I liked it when it was more centrally placed. They used to make a bigger deal of it, but they've moved it after that last incident. Attracting the wrong sort of attention, I guess. It's probably for the best. It's served its purpose for them by now anyway. They've told the story they wanted to tell.

I still remember when mum first told me about grandad. We'd just had dinner and she sat me down on that old black leather sofa we used to have. She said she wanted me to hear it directly from her, no one else. I didn't really understand it at the time:

“Part of a network that launched a violent campaign against international plans for the mandatory Global Surveillance System”,



"A hacker who brought chaos to several cities around the world in protest, and who may or may not have been involved in the murder of one of the political architects of the agreement",

"His capture marked the end of the short-lived international resistance".

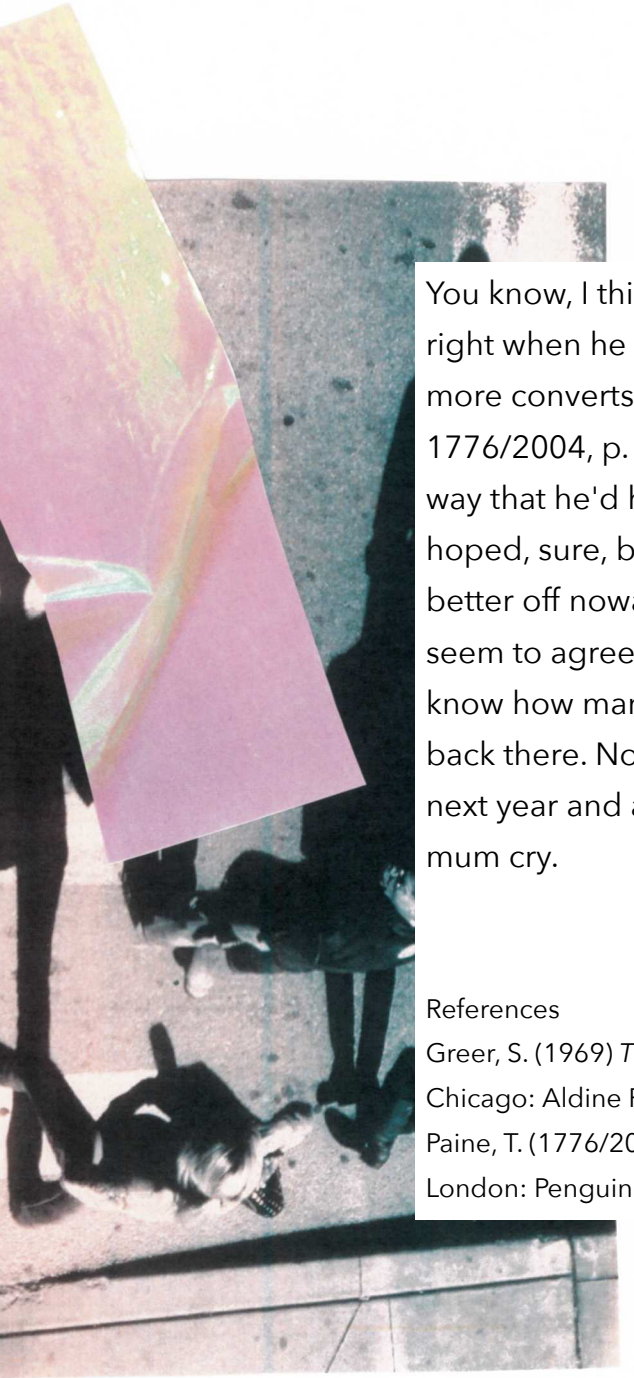
Or something like that. Honestly, I didn't even know what half of those words were back then. I'm always a little reluctant to go these days, but I know how much it means to mum. I mean, she was only 14 when he was sentenced. And then with him dying mysteriously in prison a few months later, I can't even imagine how hard it must have been. Whatever else he was, he was her dad. Every time we go, I see how much it weighs on her still. I hate to see her cry.

Things are different now though. The world's moved on. I remember my sociology teacher last year talking to me in private when he found out who I was. He didn't give me any grief, not like some of my classmates. He just tried to explain things, you know, from an academic perspective. But he was alright.

He had this one really old quote that he kept sharing, I've heard it so many times now it's pretty much seared into my mind:
'...problems are always defined by the *values* of the society. Growing out of value conflict, they represent efforts to reformulate the world and bring it closer to what is desired' (Greer 1969, p. 9 – emphasis in original).

And grandad was on the losing side. To be honest, much as mum doesn't really like to talk about it, I can kind of see why. In civics class, the thing they keep drilling into us is that you ought to live a life not just for yourself, not just for your immediate community or group, but for the broader human community at large. For a while I thought he must have been a real selfish guy, like, why should his wants come ahead of everyone else's needs? Why would you think that? How could you think like that? It's not all about you! Don't you want people living healthier lives for longer? Don't they

matter to you? But now I think he was just afraid. And I get it, I do. Past trauma can do that, cloud your present. Nowadays I don't doubt he thought he was doing the right thing, especially after what had happened to some of his family, but he couldn't see the bigger picture. He let that fear tunnel his vision. Since we've all been interconnected, crime is way down. Outbreaks of disease are almost unheard of. Illnesses are caught much earlier. I mean, they caught my cancer in time that way! Uncle Mike's heart disease! Aunt Jenny's COPD! Alan's sepsis! Bob's Alzheimer's! Who wouldn't want that, for themselves and others? Why wouldn't you give up some privacy for that? The whole mindset seems weird now. People were suffering and dying before. Every day. Without exception. Every damn day! They still do sometimes, but nowhere near as often. If they'd gotten their way it would've just continued as before and for what? Some half-thought-out notions of freedom, liberty, and privacy? Come on! How do you expect to stop people falling through the cracks in society without actually plugging those gaps?!



You know, I think Thomas Paine was right when he said, 'Time makes more converts than reason' (Paine 1776/2004, p. 3). Maybe not in a way that he'd have thought or hoped, sure, but I reckon we're better off nowadays. Most people seem to agree. Anyways, I don't know how many more times I'll get back there. Not with uni starting next year and all. Still, I hate to see mum cry.

References

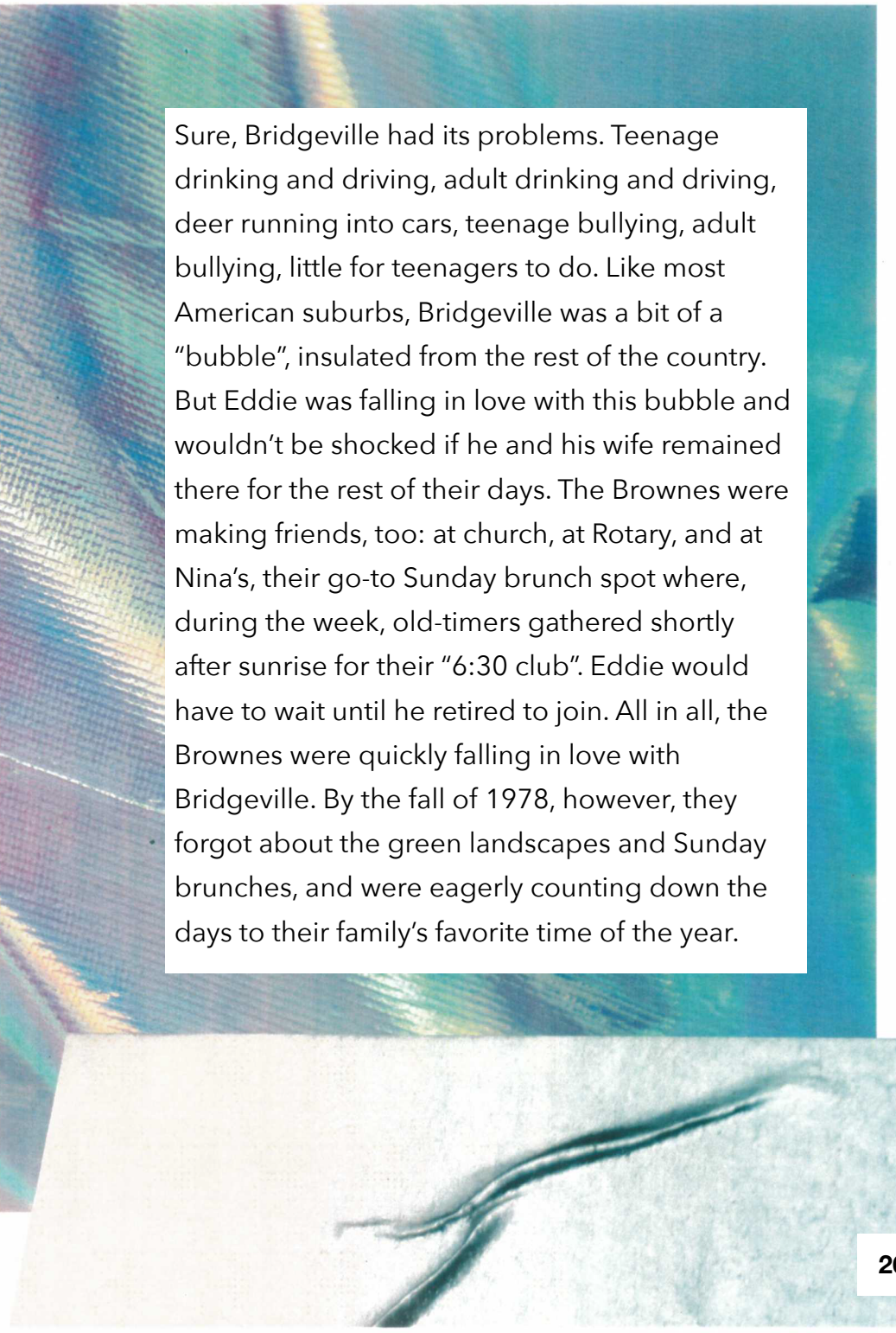
Greer, S. (1969) *The Logic of Social Inquiry*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Paine, T. (1776/2004) *Common Sense*, London: Penguin Books Ltd.

The Brownes of Bridgeville (Part I)

Joseph Cleary

Eddie Browne Sr. thought he had entered a portal to another universe, literally. The father of two recently finished reading Carl Sagan's new book, *The Dragons of Eden*, and Bridgeville looked like the prehistoric terrestrial planet on the book's cover. So green! Eddie had never seen a green so magnificent as the well-manicured upper middle-class lawns of Bridgeville. He didn't know such natural beauty existed. Eddie found the people of this 285-year-old rural suburban town to be equally charming. Strangers opened doors for one another. Neighbors picked up wayward recycling bins for each other. Bridgevillers struck up conversations in checkout lines at the organic grocery store, at the Post Office, at the hotdog man. People legitimately wanted to know how you were doing. Eddie had been a man in a hurry his entire life, but things were starting to slow down. This just felt like home.



Sure, Bridgeville had its problems. Teenage drinking and driving, adult drinking and driving, deer running into cars, teenage bullying, adult bullying, little for teenagers to do. Like most American suburbs, Bridgeville was a bit of a "bubble", insulated from the rest of the country. But Eddie was falling in love with this bubble and wouldn't be shocked if he and his wife remained there for the rest of their days. The Brownes were making friends, too: at church, at Rotary, and at Nina's, their go-to Sunday brunch spot where, during the week, old-timers gathered shortly after sunrise for their "6:30 club". Eddie would have to wait until he retired to join. All in all, the Brownes were quickly falling in love with Bridgeville. By the fall of 1978, however, they forgot about the green landscapes and Sunday brunches, and were eagerly counting down the days to their family's favorite time of the year.



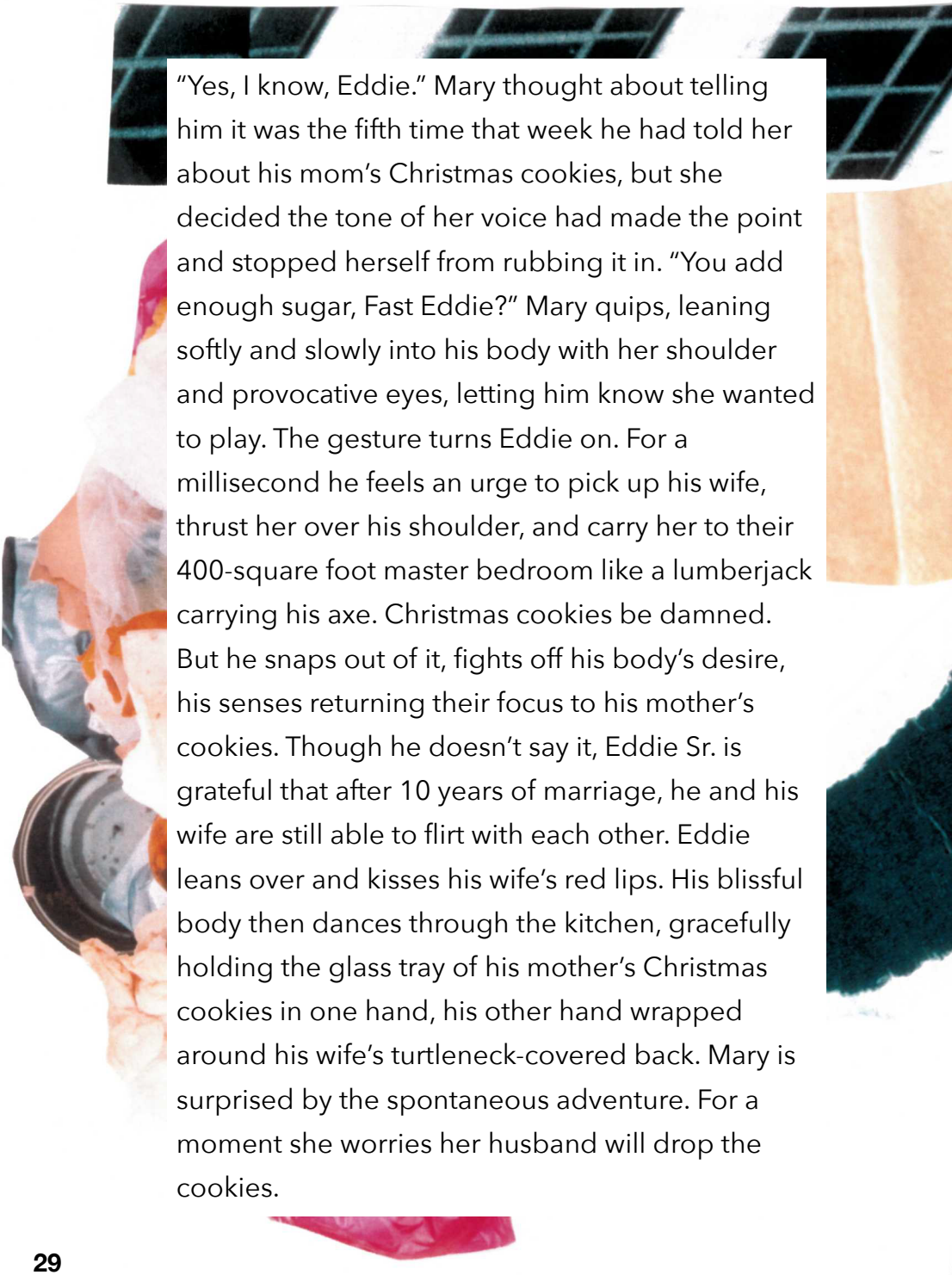
The Eve of Christmas Eve, 1978



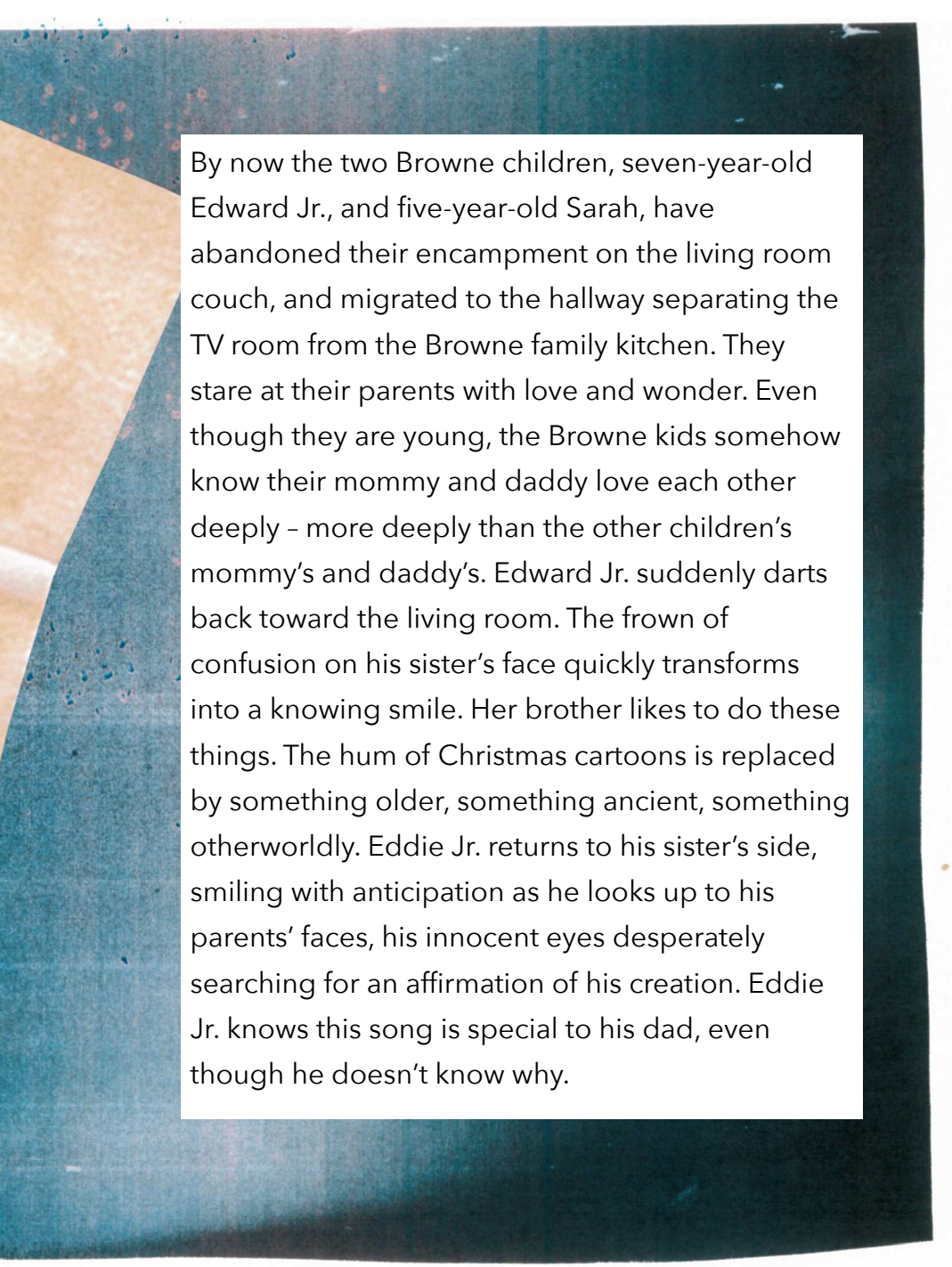
Delicious fumes emanate from the light brown and dark-black-dotted gobs of cookie dough in Eddie's distracted hands, stimulating his anterior olfactory nucleus, a linguine-like part of the human brain that scientists are beginning to believe is responsible for the connections between odors and memory. "Don't beat them to death, Edward." Eddie could hear his mom like she was standing beside him now, arms crossed, in his new kitchen. His callused hands continued to massage the chocolate chip cookie dough, momentarily lost in the memory of his mom's voice. Though he missed her very much, it was hard for the 35-year-old Human Resources executive not to smile. "Penny for your thoughts, Eddie," Mary Browne tells her husband as she enters the autumn plaid kitchen with long strides of faded beige denim. Mary liked to know what her soulmate was thinking, especially when he seemed to be lost in thought, and this was her go-to phrase. Eddie knew it well.



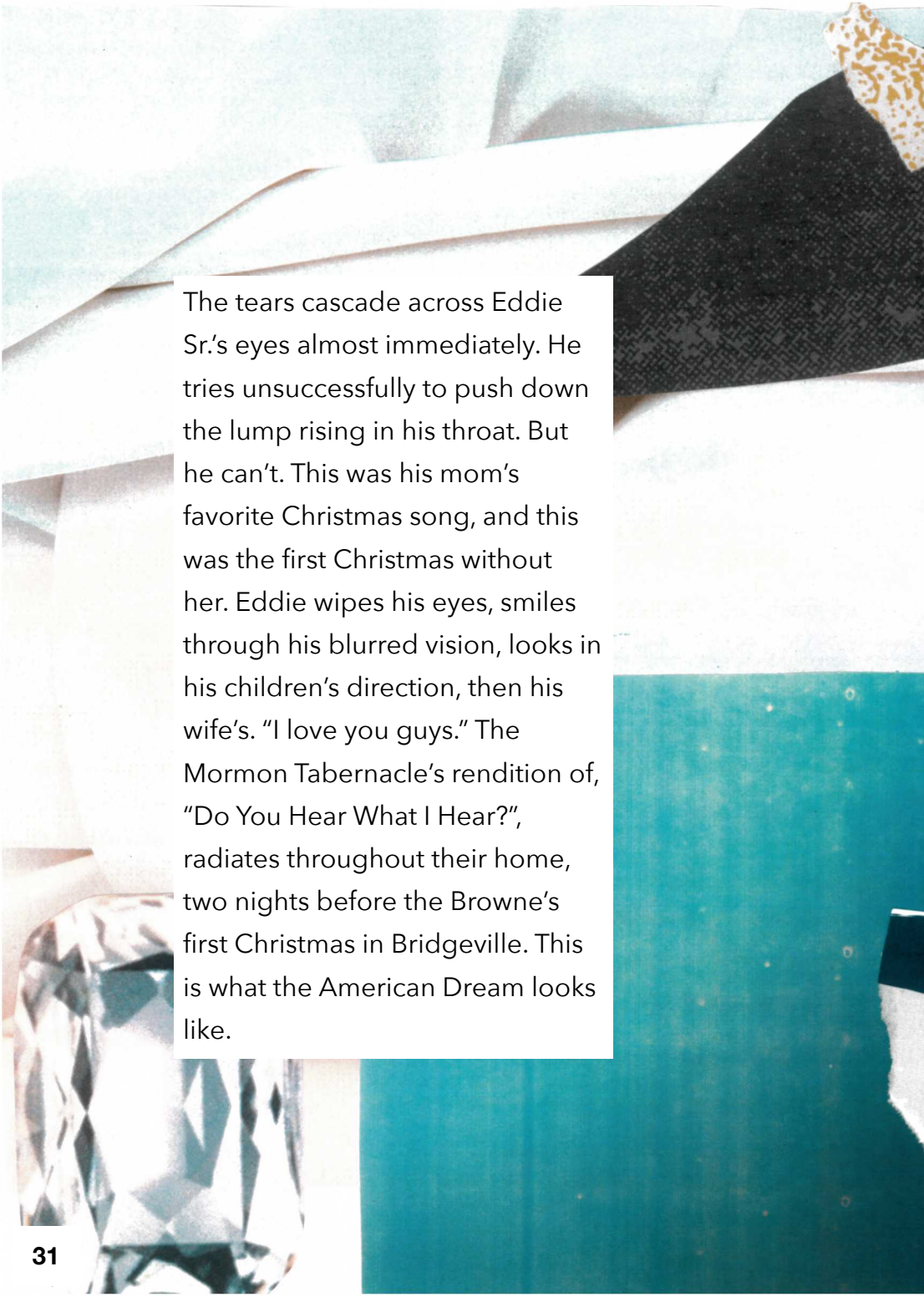
"Oh, just thinking about my mom. This was her recipe, you know."



"Yes, I know, Eddie." Mary thought about telling him it was the fifth time that week he had told her about his mom's Christmas cookies, but she decided the tone of her voice had made the point and stopped herself from rubbing it in. "You add enough sugar, Fast Eddie?" Mary quips, leaning softly and slowly into his body with her shoulder and provocative eyes, letting him know she wanted to play. The gesture turns Eddie on. For a millisecond he feels an urge to pick up his wife, thrust her over his shoulder, and carry her to their 400-square foot master bedroom like a lumberjack carrying his axe. Christmas cookies be damned. But he snaps out of it, fights off his body's desire, his senses returning their focus to his mother's cookies. Though he doesn't say it, Eddie Sr. is grateful that after 10 years of marriage, he and his wife are still able to flirt with each other. Eddie leans over and kisses his wife's red lips. His blissful body then dances through the kitchen, gracefully holding the glass tray of his mother's Christmas cookies in one hand, his other hand wrapped around his wife's turtleneck-covered back. Mary is surprised by the spontaneous adventure. For a moment she worries her husband will drop the cookies.



By now the two Browne children, seven-year-old Edward Jr., and five-year-old Sarah, have abandoned their encampment on the living room couch, and migrated to the hallway separating the TV room from the Browne family kitchen. They stare at their parents with love and wonder. Even though they are young, the Browne kids somehow know their mommy and daddy love each other deeply – more deeply than the other children's mommy's and daddy's. Edward Jr. suddenly darts back toward the living room. The frown of confusion on his sister's face quickly transforms into a knowing smile. Her brother likes to do these things. The hum of Christmas cartoons is replaced by something older, something ancient, something otherworldly. Eddie Jr. returns to his sister's side, smiling with anticipation as he looks up to his parents' faces, his innocent eyes desperately searching for an affirmation of his creation. Eddie Jr. knows this song is special to his dad, even though he doesn't know why.



The tears cascade across Eddie Sr.'s eyes almost immediately. He tries unsuccessfully to push down the lump rising in his throat. But he can't. This was his mom's favorite Christmas song, and this was the first Christmas without her. Eddie wipes his eyes, smiles through his blurred vision, looks in his children's direction, then his wife's. "I love you guys." The Mormon Tabernacle's rendition of, "Do You Hear What I Hear?", radiates throughout their home, two nights before the Browne's first Christmas in Bridgeville. This is what the American Dream looks like.

Breathe

Leanne Downing

"…we cannot be in the present moment and run our story lines at the same time."

Pema Chodron [i]

She sits. Socked feet soft against the rough ply of meeting room carpet. From the window's reflection she can see everyone in the room. Five lawyers, seven business development staff, eight new graduates, one pay-by-the-hour corporate mindfulness instructor, and her.

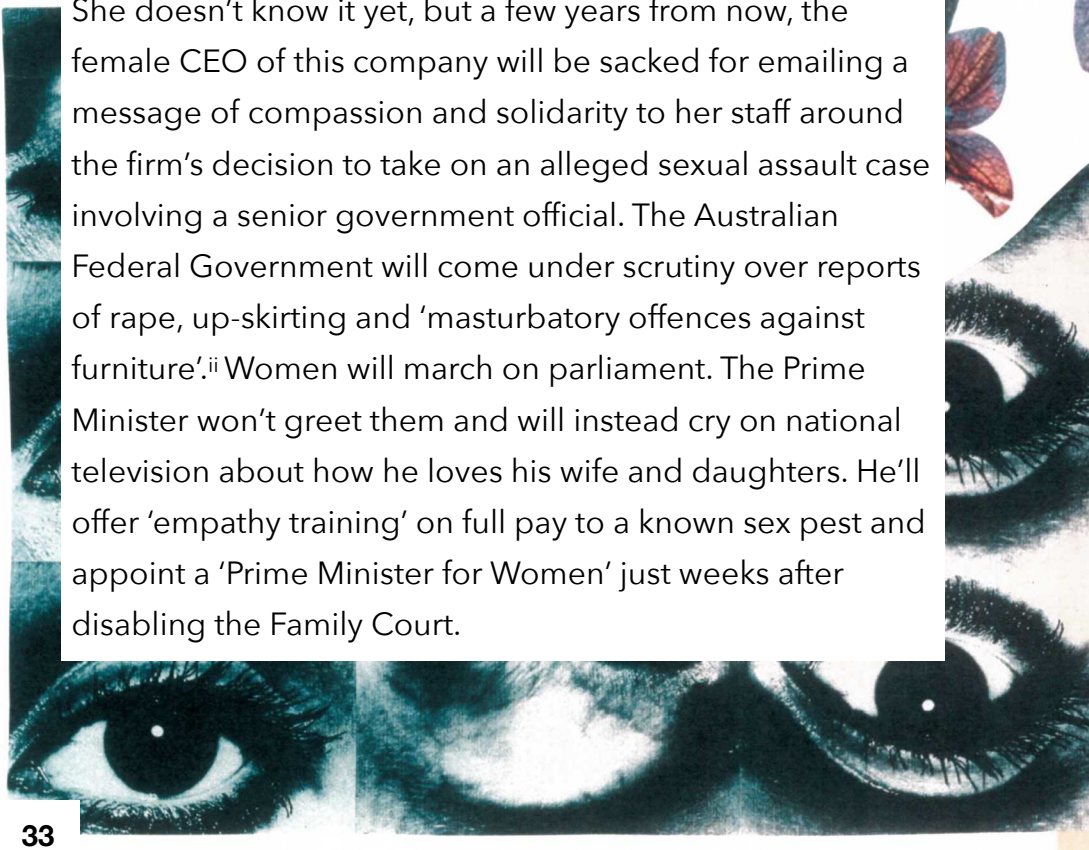
Disaster.

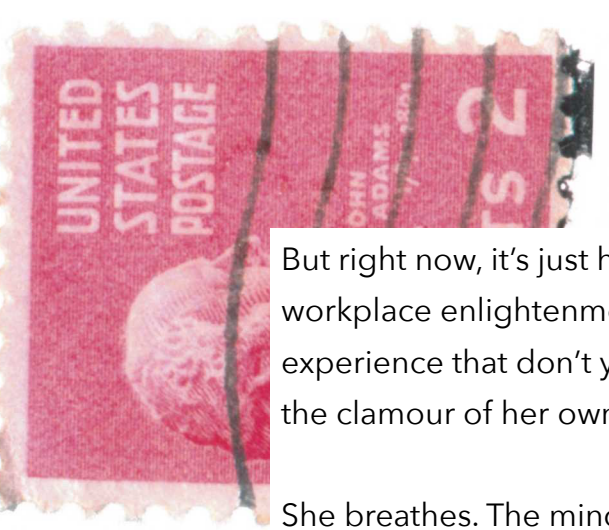
'When we practice mindfulness in the workplace, we aim to slow down the chatter in our mind. We try to be one with the present moment and to extend empathy and kindness to each other. This helps us to work as a team and optimise our efficiencies', says the instructor.

Her heart sinks as the instructor's iPhone sounds a synthetic gong.

She doesn't trust this. Asking a bunch of narcissists to consider empathy doesn't result in a better workplace. It just gives them new words through which to mask their abuses. She spies the latest round of university graduates sitting near the front. Salon-preened women and fresh-faced men, neat in their mum-ironed work clothes. They remind her of the young liberals from her student days; shark-smile bullies whose propensities for covert violence against 'minority' students were expertly honed.

She doesn't know it yet, but a few years from now, the female CEO of this company will be sacked for emailing a message of compassion and solidarity to her staff around the firm's decision to take on an alleged sexual assault case involving a senior government official. The Australian Federal Government will come under scrutiny over reports of rape, up-skirting and 'masturbatory offences against furniture'.[ii] Women will march on parliament. The Prime Minister won't greet them and will instead cry on national television about how he loves his wife and daughters. He'll offer 'empathy training' on full pay to a known sex pest and appoint a 'Prime Minister for Women' just weeks after disabling the Family Court.

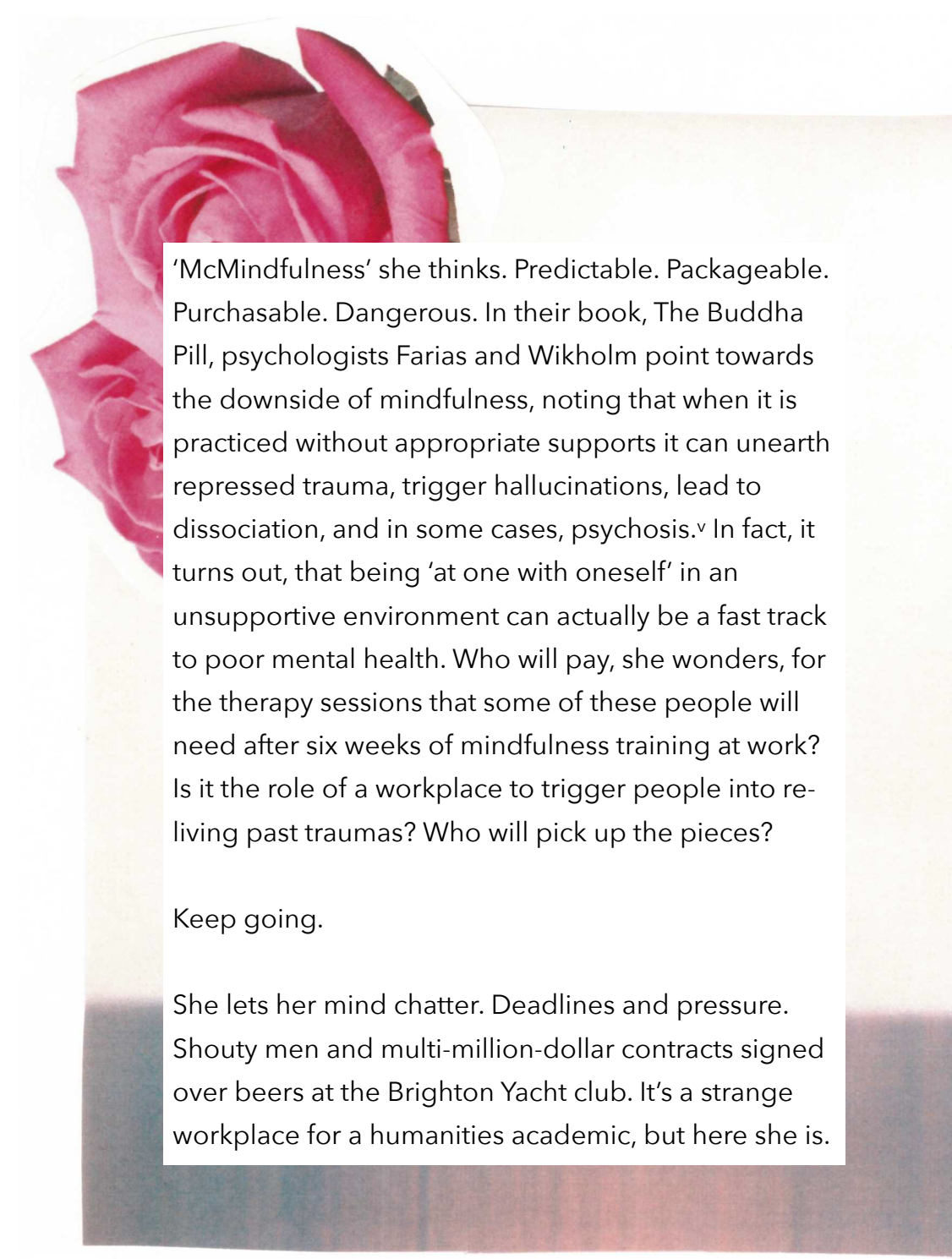




But right now, it's just her and these sessions on workplace enlightenment. Fragments of experience that don't yet fit into a narrative, and the clamour of her own dissenting thoughts.

She breathes. The mind can indeed be cleared, equanimity can be achieved. But not here. This isn't her local Buddhist centre with its friendly sangha and welcoming meditation cushions. Best to just keep breathing and find a story line that distracts from the one being told in this room.

Zen Buddhist scholar Ronald Purser has a name for this commercialised meditation carry-on. He calls it 'McMindfulness'.[iii] Purser appropriated this term from sociologist George Ritzer, who back in the 90s had a fair bit to say about the McDonaldisation of Society, and Western culture's obsession with buying and selling standardized, and predictable experiences.[iv]



'McMindfulness' she thinks. Predictable. Packageable. Purchasable. Dangerous. In their book, The Buddha Pill, psychologists Farias and Wikholm point towards the downside of mindfulness, noting that when it is practiced without appropriate supports it can unearth repressed trauma, trigger hallucinations, lead to dissociation, and in some cases, psychosis.[v] In fact, it turns out, that being 'at one with oneself' in an unsupportive environment can actually be a fast track to poor mental health. Who will pay, she wonders, for the therapy sessions that some of these people will need after six weeks of mindfulness training at work? Is it the role of a workplace to trigger people into re-living past traumas? Who will pick up the pieces?

Keep going.

She lets her mind chatter. Deadlines and pressure. Shouty men and multi-million-dollar contracts signed over beers at the Brighton Yacht club. It's a strange workplace for a humanities academic, but here she is.



Well, academia wasn't going to pay the bills, was it? Fixed term research opportunities, and teaching only roles … You can't secure a mortgage with that, and if you somehow did, where's the job security to say that you could sustain it? Oh, the bullshit academia tells us. The narratives we inhale.

Keep breathing.

On the street below, a group of people are protesting with megaphones about the firm's role in a high-profile asbestos case. They're chanting about compensation. They want recognition for lives lost or ruined. It's not coming any time soon though. The protesters don't know, but inside this building you can't even hear them.

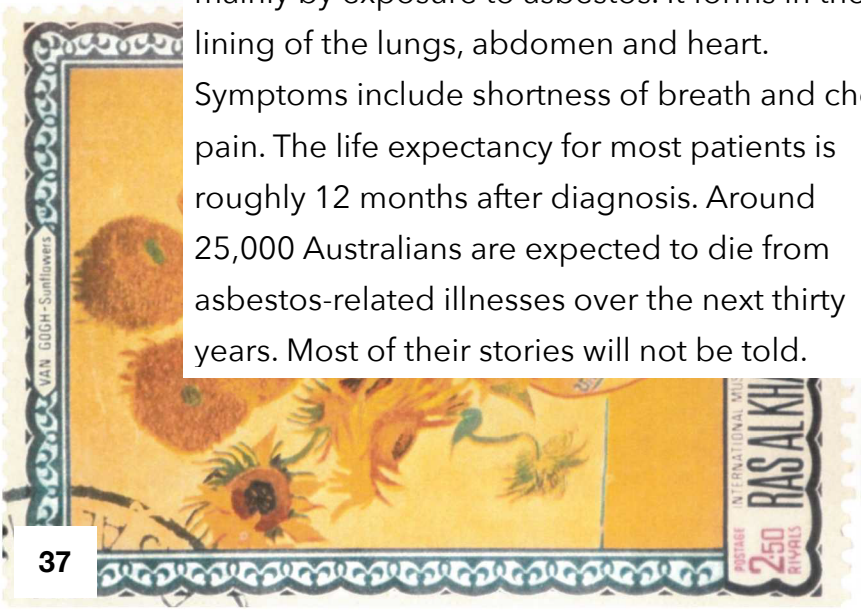
She contemplates empathy and respect and the people that this place doesn't recognise. Working class men with non-event lungs. Sexual abuse survivors. The Wurundjeri people - traditional owners of unceded land that today's meeting, once again, didn't acknowledge. Once, in a different place, on the other side of town, she would have written papers and urged conversations about these things in her tutorials. But not today, in fact, not for a good while. In a few years' time, a

pandemic will stop the international students arriving. Her university will take this as a cue to close down entire departments. She'll watch in horror as mass unemployment sweeps the humanities. An entire generation of scholars will scramble for work and consider employment opportunities in places just like this one. She'll be long gone from here. There will be new stories to tell and old ones to unravel.

Inhale.

The ability to do so is a privilege.

Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer caused mainly by exposure to asbestos. It forms in the lining of the lungs, abdomen and heart. Symptoms include shortness of breath and chest pain. The life expectancy for most patients is roughly 12 months after diagnosis. Around 25,000 Australians are expected to die from asbestos-related illnesses over the next thirty years. Most of their stories will not be told.



Exhale.

'The bad news', said Tibetan Buddhist meditation master Chogyam Trungpa, 'is that you are falling through the air with nothing to hang on to – no parachute. The good news is that there is no ground'.[vi]



i Chödrön, P. (2000). *When things fall apart: Heart advice for difficult times.* Boston: Shambhala

ii Tingle, L 'Laura Tingle on the Prime Minister's apology' Posted Tue 23 Mar 2021, 8:26pm; Updated Tue 23 Mar 2021, 11:03pm https://www.abc.net.au/7.30/laura-tingle-on-the-prime-ministers-apology/13270266

iii Purser, Ronald E. "Mcmindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality." [In English]. (2019).

iv Ritzer, George. (1996). *The McDonaldization of society: an investigation into the changing character of contemporary social life*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Pine Forge Press

v Wikholm, C., & Farias, M. (2015). *The Buddha Pill: Can Meditation Change You?* Watkins Publishing

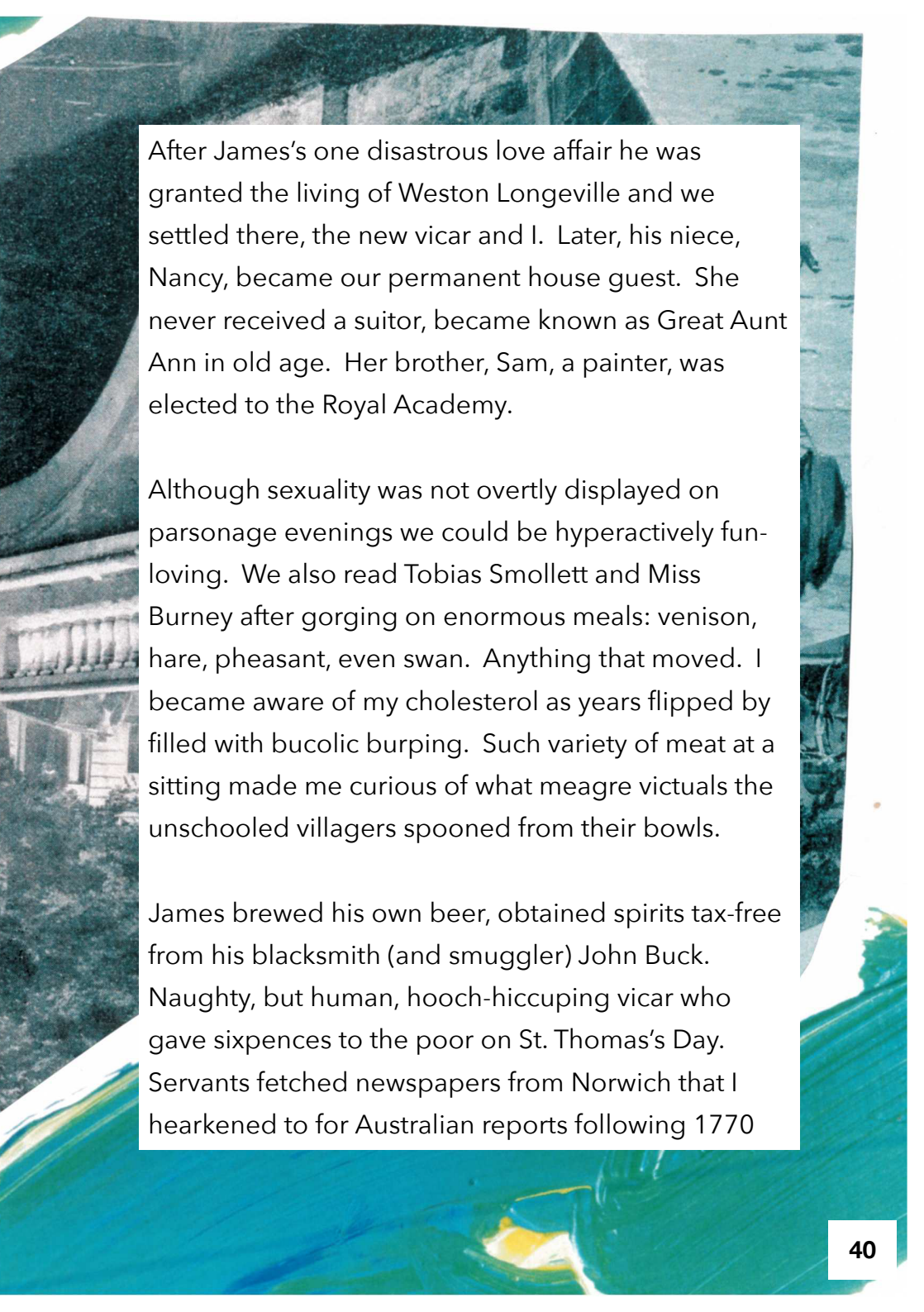
vi Trungpa, C., Baker, J., & Casper, M. (1987). *Cutting through spiritual materialism.* Boston: Shambhala.

To the Parsonage

Ian C Smith

In a Norfolk bookshop I found *The Diary of a Country Parson* by James Woodforde, this edited version printed in 1949, inscribed as such by fountain pen at Holt Rectory. Reading James's life manifest, £3 worth of time travel, left a mosaic of yearning memories. From rural Somerset in our youth we rode to Oxford by post-chaise meeting the sort of people you might meet travelling today, dining at inns while ostlers changed horses. On one slow stage a woman's boxes crowded our limited space over rough roads through England's greenery.

As students we skated on the frozen Thames, air deliciously chill, played cricket, watched bear-baiting, and attended the trial of a highwayman. Upon graduation our fellows, radicals who drank and smoked excessively, broke down our doors to carry us off to Stow-on-the-Wold, a wild night ride of celebration shattering the silence, setting hounds a'howling.



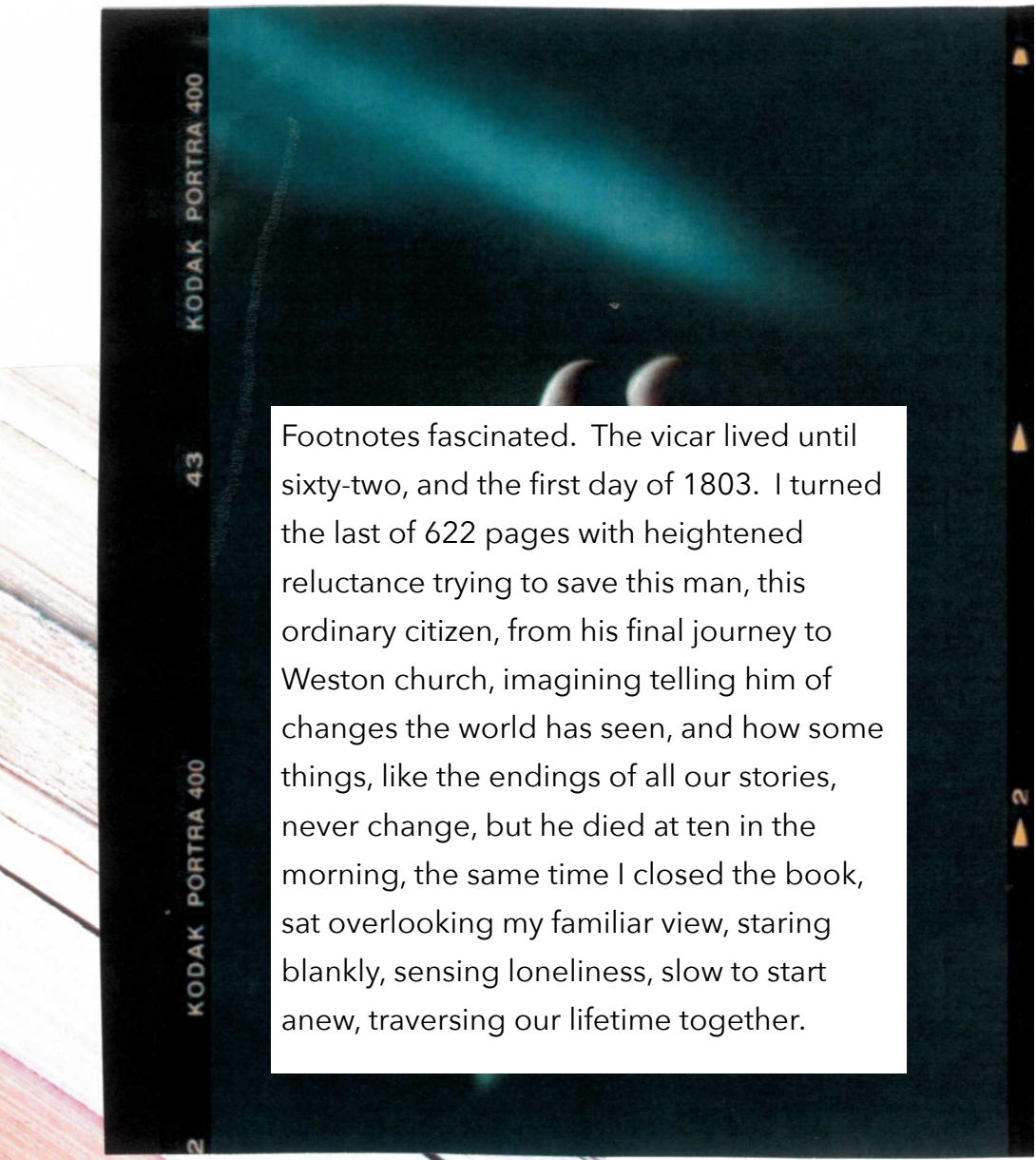
After James's one disastrous love affair he was granted the living of Weston Longeville and we settled there, the new vicar and I. Later, his niece, Nancy, became our permanent house guest. She never received a suitor, became known as Great Aunt Ann in old age. Her brother, Sam, a painter, was elected to the Royal Academy.

Although sexuality was not overtly displayed on parsonage evenings we could be hyperactively fun-loving. We also read Tobias Smollett and Miss Burney after gorging on enormous meals: venison, hare, pheasant, even swan. Anything that moved. I became aware of my cholesterol as years flipped by filled with bucolic burping. Such variety of meat at a sitting made me curious of what meagre victuals the unschooled villagers spooned from their bowls.

James brewed his own beer, obtained spirits tax-free from his blacksmith (and smuggler) John Buck. Naughty, but human, hooch-hiccuping vicar who gave sixpences to the poor on St. Thomas's Day. Servants fetched newspapers from Norwich that I hearkened to for Australian reports following 1770

and 1788, discovering only a reference to some prints of Cook's adventures for sale in London years after his death. The news proclaimed Pitt's taxes, and the war with France, the nation united against the dastardly French. We saw Pitt once, at an inn, warming his bum, held up for want of fresh horses, as were we.

The vicar's man, paid four guineas per annum, spoke his mind when drunk, forgetting his place, unaware his insubordination, like his income, would become a diary entry. Peasant immortality. Family members married, died, and undertook arduous trips between Weston and Somerset via London which hardly featured in our innocent lives. Towards the end, Nelson, a son of Norfolk, was lionised, inflation became a problem, the price of wheat impossible. We shivered through increasingly harsh winters with no inkling of future greenhouse effect.



Footnotes fascinated. The vicar lived until sixty-two, and the first day of 1803. I turned the last of 622 pages with heightened reluctance trying to save this man, this ordinary citizen, from his final journey to Weston church, imagining telling him of changes the world has seen, and how some things, like the endings of all our stories, never change, but he died at ten in the morning, the same time I closed the book, sat overlooking my familiar view, staring blankly, sensing loneliness, slow to start anew, traversing our lifetime together.

The Brownes of Bridgeville (Part II)

Joseph Cleary

After the kids open a few presents, Eddie and Mary are ready for alone time. Eddie Jr. went down without any resistance. Sarah put up some fight but was sold on Mary's promise that Santa would be visiting soon (28 hours, the mother and daughter calculate). Eddie Jr.'s early submission had allowed Sr. to escape back to the kitchen and create his wife's favorite cocktail. It's the little things, Eddie says to himself. Eddie and Mary had recently taken an interest in mixology, a hobby that endeared the Browne's with many of their new neighbors at a neighborhood Christmas party. After putting the milk and Kahlúa away, Eddie grabs the two White Russians, and scurries back to the living room, almost forgetting the second step in the miniature shag-carpeted stairwell that separates the two rooms.

The living room is the best room in the Browne home: 25-foot ceilings supported by Revolutionary War era-like unfinished wooden beams, a towering

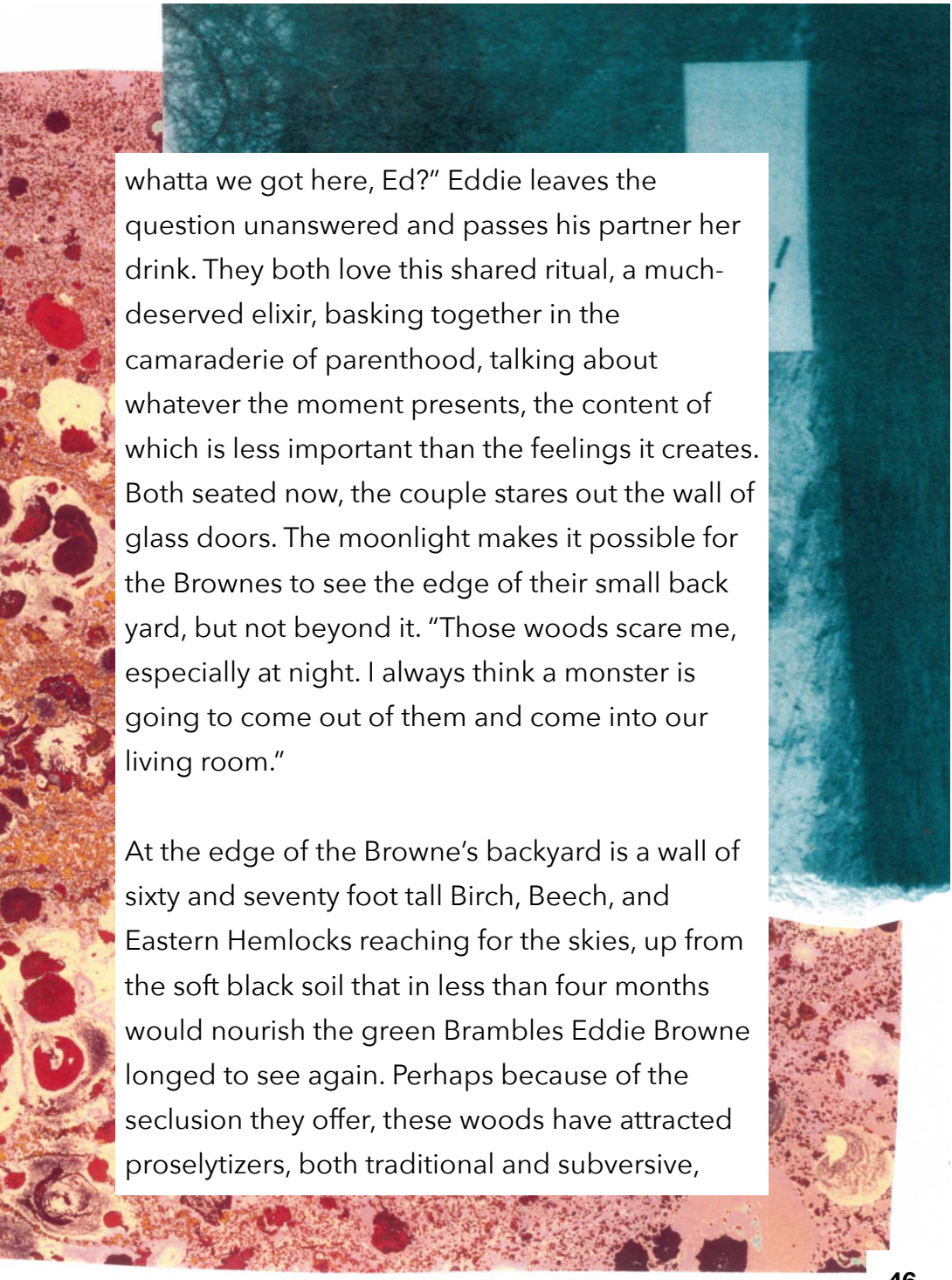




Christmas tree that literally lit up the neighborhood (or seemed to at least), a beautiful blue and yellow Persian rug that Eddie Sr.'s brother and sister-in-law gave to the Browne's as a wedding present, a dark mahogany antique cobbler's bench that doubled as a coffee table, a massive (massive!) green-pea-colored corduroy sofa, a side table that Uncle Tom liked to rest his double vodkas on, three 2x5 foot rectangular windows that provided views to the Stein's home on the north end of the living room, a wall of glass doors that opened up to the back deck and yard on the south side of the room, and vanilla bean white walls on the east, west, and part of the north side of the living room, decorated with frames of Browne family memories: Eddie Jr. sobbing in his walker at his first family part, the family trip to Sanibel Island, the family trip to Gulf Shores, the family reunion in Gulf Shores, the kids' first snow storm, Eddie Jr. and Eddie Sr.'s pictures from that Panama City boardwalk photo booth, Eddie Sr. and Mary's wedding – among many, many other photographs and custom-made silhouette portraits of each member of the happy family.

After she put down Sarah, Mary returned to the master bedroom to slip into her favorite grey sweats and sweatshirt. Her body now comfortably walks through the dark and narrow yellow hallway, surrounded by more images of birthdays and vacations, walks past her husband's baking cookies, momentarily thinking about her mother-in-law (quickly vanquishing that thought), and finally arrives at her destination. The living room is different. The lights have dimmed. The Mormons have been replaced by Donna Summer. Eddie has been at work. For her. It's the little things he does for her that makes Mary love him, she knowingly smiles to herself.

Her husband is waiting for her in a familiar pose, one that meant Eddie was feeling good about himself: legs crossed, nonchalantly leaning backward against the sofa, two drinks sitting still on the converted coffee table. Mary imagines this is how Eddie poses in front of his colleagues at the office. His confidence turns Mary on. She smells the rum and coffee beans before they reach her nostrils. Mary has been looking forward to an after-kids-are-put-down cocktail all day long. "Well



whatta we got here, Ed?" Eddie leaves the question unanswered and passes his partner her drink. They both love this shared ritual, a much-deserved elixir, basking together in the camaraderie of parenthood, talking about whatever the moment presents, the content of which is less important than the feelings it creates. Both seated now, the couple stares out the wall of glass doors. The moonlight makes it possible for the Brownes to see the edge of their small back yard, but not beyond it. "Those woods scare me, especially at night. I always think a monster is going to come out of them and come into our living room."

At the edge of the Browne's backyard is a wall of sixty and seventy foot tall Birch, Beech, and Eastern Hemlocks reaching for the skies, up from the soft black soil that in less than four months would nourish the green Brambles Eddie Browne longed to see again. Perhaps because of the seclusion they offer, these woods have attracted proselytizers, both traditional and subversive,

throughout much of the 20th century. A group of Catholic nuns calling themselves the Congregation of Notre Dame has owned a vast swath of these woods – perhaps over 100 acres – since the early 1960s. More recently, a group of Bridgeville teens also began using a nearby hill, deeper in the woods, allegedly as a meeting grounds for their Satanic cult. It's not clear how committed they were to scripture, but there is evidence indicating that their meetings involve drugs, orgies, and animal sacrifices. Squatting behind one of the monstrous trees in full body Army camouflage fatigues is a 21-year-old Bridgeviller who has been watching his targets through his family's worn black binoculars – the same pair his parents used to bring on vacations, back when they went on vacations. *To the predator's right is a duffel bag containing a large red tin can of gasoline that he took from his parent's garage and several long black linen rags from the attic. To his left is an eight-foot-tall by four-feet-wide maple wooden cross. The predator looks down at the metallic antique lighter cradled in the palm of his right hand, opens the latch, and begins striking the virgin skin of his double-jointed thumb off the jagged edges of cold brass. Odors of gasoline fill his nostrils. Although he is half drunk, the predator still feels the sensation of pain, the violent friction of flesh and metal. On the second try, a flame emerges. And then he did something that Bridgevillers would talk about for the next 100 years.*

Misdemeanor Charge Is Called Too Lenient In Cross-Burning Case

By RICHARD L. MADDEN

Special to The New York Times

RIDGEFIELD, Conn., Jan. 24 — The police in this affluent, predominantly white Fairfield County town announced today that they had filed misdemeanor charges against five young men who allegedly burned a cross early Christmas morning in front of the home of a black resident, but the resident and state and local civil-rights leaders contended that the charges were too lenient.

The home was that of Edward Browne, a self-employed personnel placement executive who is black; his wife, who is white, and their two children. Following the incident, Mr. Browne and local members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People expressed concern about the pace of the police investigation.

Thomas Rotunda, the Ridgefield Police

Connecticut Man Is Indicted By U.S. in a Cross-Burning

By DIANE HENRY

Special to The New York Times

STAMFORD, Conn., Sept. 26 — A Federal grand jury today indicted a 19-year-old Ridgefield man in a cross-burning incident in that town last year. It was the first such Federal prosecution in the recent wave of cross-burnings around the metropolitan area.

In separate actions today, three white men, one of them a former policeman, were arrested on Long Island in connection with the burning of a cross at the home of a black woman who had just bought a house in their community of Valley Stream, and three more men were arrested in Piscataway, N.J., in connection with racial violence in that city in the last two weeks.

In the Connecticut case, the decision to prosecute on a Federal charge was approved by the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department in Washington. Robert D. Stewart, who was arrested with four other white men last Dec. 24, was convicted in a state court of disorderly conduct and was sentenced to 30 days in jail. Today he was charged with violating the civil rights laws by "intimidating and interfering with a family in Ridgefield because of their race and color."

The victim of the cross-burning, Edward Browne, a self-employed personnel-placement executive and a black, and local civil rights leaders argued that the state charges were too lenient.

United States Attorney Richard Blumenthal said, in explaining the decision to prosecute: "Our feeling was, in light of all the facts, particularly the impact on the family involved and the deterrent purpose that would be served by a prosecution, that the Federal Government ought to go ahead."

Mr. Blumenthal said he did not expect any more indictments from the Federal grand jury in Bridgeport involving the Ridgefield cross-burning, but he refused to comment on the reasons.

In addition to cross-burnings on Long Island and in Brooklyn, there have been cross-burnings in New Haven, Bridgeport, Waterbury and Norwalk, as well as in Ridgefield, Conn.

Following the burning of a wooden cross shortly after midnight on Dec. 24 last year in Mr. Browne's front yard, he moved to a new house with his wife, who

The three young men were charged with aggravated assault with baseball bats on Sept. 13 and 14. The assaults resulted in a series of racial incidents that finally ended Friday night, said Acting Police Chief Daniel Conger.

The suspects are identified as John Ingarra Jr., Donald Bruce Kuss and Michael Gallagher, all 18, white and from North Plainfield. Eleven whites and more

To Extinguish Burning Crosses

Stopping the wave of cross-burnings on the lawns of black families in the New York area is the job of local law enforcement agencies. But there is room also for Federal law enforcement, both to deter such vicious vandalism and to encourage local agencies to act against it. So it is good that a United States Attorney has brought a Federal criminal case against a young cross-burner in Ridgefield, Conn.

Many people fail to see how deeply these burning crosses sear their targets — or the whole climate of racial feeling in the community. Ken Anderson of Port

stands for people who would take us back to slavery. When I saw that cross on my lawn, the world lost all its civility. Now, when I leave my house my only sense of security is a police patrol car circling my block."

The Connecticut case involves a 19-year-old, convicted locally for having burned a cross and sentenced to 30 days. Now he has been indicted also on Federal charges of violating civil rights laws "by intimidating and interfering with a family because of their race." If convicted, he could go to prison for a year. Richard Blumenthal, the United States Attorney for Connect-

he family involved
uld be served by a
rnment ought to go
d share that hope.

Cross-Burning Moves Selectmen To Express Regrets to Family

The Board of Selectmen last night publicly expressed its regrets over the cross-burning which occurred early Christmas Eve at a home on Old Sib road.

Meanwhile, First Selectman Louis J. Fossi told the selectmen last night that he had met with the police yesterday and was assured by Chief Thomas Rotunda that a full in-

who is black, and Mrs. Browne who is white, had moved here in June and had not reported any previous racially connected incidents.

The selectmen approved Selectman Moorhead's request publicly the Browne family "in this incident happened hope it doesn't prevent from living in this town they remain here any years to come. The resolution urges the town to take "to s

(Continued

Norton Deplores Burning of Cross

To the Editors:

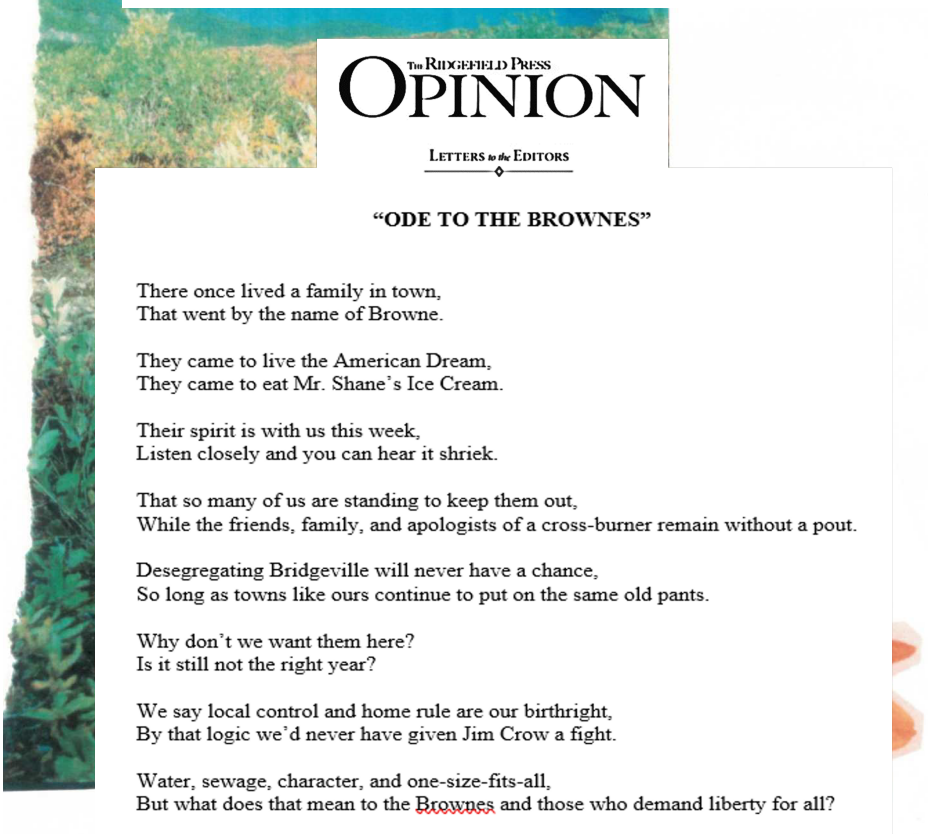
As were so many others, I was saddened and am appalled by the cross burning on the Browne's lawn on Christmas. This is the latest in a series of incidents which have occurred for a period of years marring this community and furthering its reputation as a town which condones archaic prejudice, ignorance, and immorality. I was equally alarmed that no public official or community leader stepped forward to make a strong public statement condemning the act. I searched subsequent editions of the Ridgefield Press and Danbury News Times for such a statement or editorial comment. I am shocked by their silence.

The presence of the Browne family along with others who bring to this community other cultures, points-of-view, languages, and perspectives enrich us all. The foundation of America and the philosophies creating its underpinnings affirm differences and insist upon tolerance. Doing so assures all of us our freedom. Failing to do so threatens us all and makes us all prey.



Edward Browne Sr. inspects the cross burned outside his home in the early morning hours of Christmas Eve 1978.

Over forty years after a burning cross was put on the Browne family's lawn, a citizen of Bridgeville writes a letter to the editor of the local newspaper connecting the 1978 cross-burning to a current effort to desegregate Connecticut's suburbs. This effort is led by a group in Hartford named, "Desegregate Connecticut", and has attracted fierce opposition throughout Connecticut's wealthiest and whitest suburbs. Resistance is especially strong in Bridgeville where residents fail to see a connection between the 1978 cross-burning and the historic lack of racial diversity in Bridgeville (if they are even aware of the event).



THE RIDGEFIELD PRESS

OPINION

LETTERS to the EDITORS

"ODE TO THE BROWNES"

There once lived a family in town,
That went by the name of Browne.

They came to live the American Dream,
They came to eat Mr. Shane's Ice Cream.

Their spirit is with us this week,
Listen closely and you can hear it shriek.

That so many of us are standing to keep them out,
While the friends, family, and apologists of a cross-burner remain without a pout.

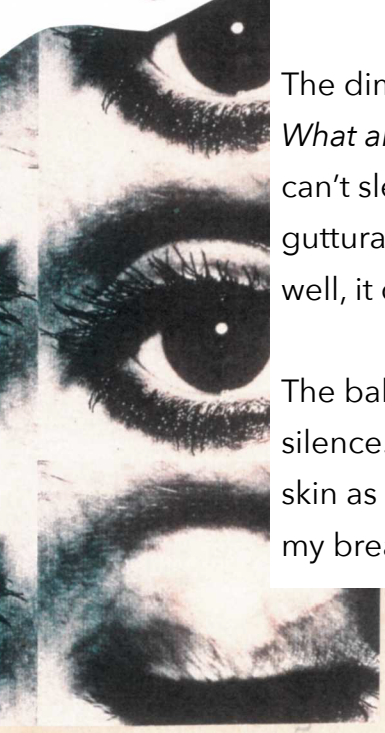
Desegregating Bridgeville will never have a chance,
So long as towns like ours continue to put on the same old pants.

Why don't we want them here?
Is it still not the right year?

We say local control and home rule are our birthright,
By that logic we'd never have given Jim Crow a fight.

Water, sewage, character, and one-size-fits-all,
But what does that mean to the Brownes and those who demand liberty for all?





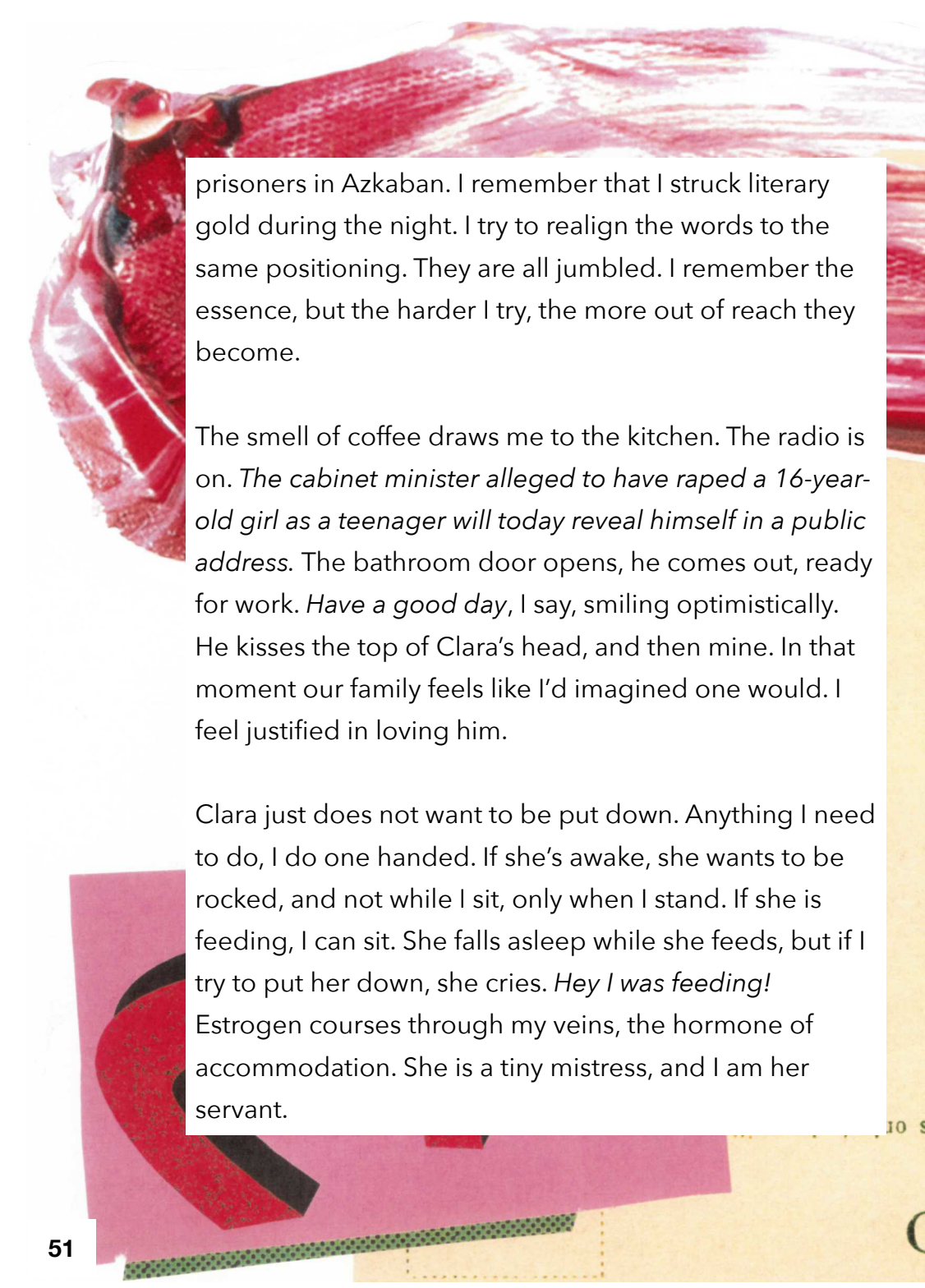
Women can have it all

Mardi Wilson

Awake at 2am, beautifully formed sentences poetic in my mind. The clarity of articulation that only occurs in inconvenient moments. I gingerly reach for my phone. The steady snoring from the body beside me falters, I freeze. His rhythm returns. Softly, I press the home button. The baby stirs. I open notes and begin to type the sentences that had been evading me for days.

The dim glow wakes him. I quickly shut it off. *What are you doing?* He's irritated. I tell him I can't sleep. *You'll wake the baby,* his voice guttural. There is no sneaking in this house. Oh well, it can wait until morning. I'll remember.

The baby's wail pierces the dense pre-dawn silence. The downy fuzz atop her head tickles my skin as she finds my nipple. She sucks milk from my breast like a dementor sucks the souls of



prisoners in Azkaban. I remember that I struck literary gold during the night. I try to realign the words to the same positioning. They are all jumbled. I remember the essence, but the harder I try, the more out of reach they become.

The smell of coffee draws me to the kitchen. The radio is on. *The cabinet minister alleged to have raped a 16-year-old girl as a teenager will today reveal himself in a public address.* The bathroom door opens, he comes out, ready for work. *Have a good day*, I say, smiling optimistically. He kisses the top of Clara's head, and then mine. In that moment our family feels like I'd imagined one would. I feel justified in loving him.

Clara just does not want to be put down. Anything I need to do, I do one handed. If she's awake, she wants to be rocked, and not while I sit, only when I stand. If she is feeding, I can sit. She falls asleep while she feeds, but if I try to put her down, she cries. *Hey I was feeding!* Estrogen courses through my veins, the hormone of accommodation. She is a tiny mistress, and I am her servant.

Clara sleeps. I take a shower, eat some toast, and put on a load of washing with the last of the laundry powder. A bucket of cloth nappies sits in the sink soaking, waiting to be washed. I turn on the computer and open the document innocuously titled 'work'. The neat black words on bright white immediately calm me. I feel a sense of purpose. I am still me.

Clara wakes. I go out to get laundry powder. It's 4pm, school traffic. I worry that I won't be home in time. A tightness spreads across my chest. My throat becomes dry. I swallow three times. The radio is on. The alleged rapist is Christian Porter, the Attorney General. This news grabs my attention. I turn the volume up. They are playing a snippet of his address. *I can say categorically that what has been put in various forms and allegations simply did not happen.* Of course he is lying. Next Morrison's on, brushing it under the rug. The presenter says that the woman Porter allegedly raped suicided. I feel overwhelmed with hopelessness. Tears sting my eyes.

I unpack the groceries and get the nappies in the machine. He walks in. *Hi*, I say. He glances at me, and then flicks through the mail on the bench, silent. *What have you been doing all day, there's shit everywhere. And what are you wearing? You look like a slob.* I raise my hand to where Clara vomited on my shirt earlier. I sit still, but my eyes dart after him as he moves around the room. His expression pulverizes my stomach.

I move to the fridge to get out vegetables for dinner. *What is this?* He demands. I turn, he is brandishing the grocery docket. *It's the grocery docket,* I say. *Don't be a smart ass,* he says. *I don't know what you're talking about,* I say, and shake my head as I walk past him with the bok choy. He grabs my arm. My eyes close for a moment. I inhale. He jerks me closer to him, his grip is tight. I can feel his breath on my face. *Why are you being such a little cunt today?* He spits into my ear. He reminds me of The Joker. My hands shake as I cut the vegetables.

I lay awake. He sleeps. My body is tired all the way down to my bones, but my mind is a circuit on repeat. I go over my plan, as I have many nights before, of how I will leave him. I grow more resolved as the clock ticks away my precious opportunity to sleep. The grey dawn wakes Clara. She latches onto my breast. He wakes, he strokes her head. He runs his hand up my inner thigh. I am repulsed. *Sorry, about last night,* he says. His fingers brush my underwear, a threat. I close my eyes for a moment. I swallow everything I want to say.

I am driving through town with Clara. My eyes sting, my fingernails are bitten down to flesh. I look for the sign the lady described. Community Connect, green and white. I find a park. As I am getting Clara out of the seat, my phone rings. Unknown number. I answer. *Hi, is this Georgia Day? It's Rachael from Allen and Unwin, is this a good time?* She asks. I tell her it is. *Great, we've read the chapter you sent through, it's very impressive Georgia.* I hold the phone to my ear. I feel like I am standing on a trainline pressed against the concrete as a train whooshes past. I clip Clara back in as I talk, speaking in auto-pilot. I am gracious and professional. I get in the driver's seat and drive home. I have a voicemail from the lady at the women's service. I don't call back.

Lying down, we take a stand: The interwovenness of stories in the rags of the rugs

Erika Wall and Jonny Bergman (story)
Jens Ljungdahl (photographs)

From the dusky corners where we are thrown, from the windy clothes lines where we are hung to air out – we are the rag-rugs, gathered in resistance.

Remove the rugs, that's the message! In official information from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency and the National Board of Health and Welfare, our woven bodies are identified as the usual suspect in cases of fall accidents among the elderly. In light of being pinpointed by the authorities as the riskiest item in the homes of the elderly, we are obliged to clarify how the very definition of the 'risky rug' is hiding other equally valuable stories about us. Interwoven within our jaded fabric – in, through and over time – different colourful narratives are the very rags from



This rug is tightly woven together
And has a heart of rags
When others would have screamed out loud my friend
This one never even spoke

Lying down, we take a stand. This is the shared voice of living the life as a rag-rug in the homes of the elderly. For decades, we have silently struggled for status in Swedish homes. When the first of our kind were carefully crafted during the 18th century, families treated us as exclusive bed linen. As time went by, we made the move from the beds down to the soap scrubbed wooden floors. We were still so rare and dear that we were only invited out for feasts and special occasions. We look back with pride on the golden days of the 1940s and 1950s when – for a brief, shining moment – we had an indisputable place on the floors of 'every' home. Well, that ended too soon; we were largely replaced in the 1960s by the brightly coloured plastic rag-rugs, praised for being modern and simple. From then on, our place in the home has been in question. Today our existence is further threatened – now on the grounds of being a risk.





I've been lied upon, I've been danced upon
I've been taken for a fool,
Taken for a risk,
When just lying on the floor

Remove the rugs, that's the message. That is the decisive conclusion announced by the authorities, health care professionals and relatives. In the official safety checklists in the homes of elderly, rugs are an issue that needs to be resolved. Daughters and sons of the elderly – taking the position of the 'responsible citizen' – reflect these messages, reflect the idea of us rugs (only) being a risk. A fall risk – a risk to the very health and life of the elderly resident.

We, the lithe old rugs, take note of the worried voice of the adult children, echoing the authorities and health professionals, privileged in relation to the perspectives of their parents. And we hear the uneasy conflicts related to our existence. Daughters and sons are distressed, because 'The elderly will never put the rugs away; they think it will be ugly and not cosy'. At the same time, our protectors, sometimes cautiously, other times more resolutely,

respond ‘It’s my home, isn’t it?! I keep the damn rug on the floor if I so choose!’

The appreciation of the cosiness we bring and the handicraft of our traditional woven nature warms our heart. But, at the same time, we sadly note that the appreciation of our qualities is limited to a few people – in relation to certain places and specific relations. We are more likely to hear loud voices making the argument that we should leave the house to protect the fragile elderly from risk.

Of course, there have been times when our elderly companions have stumbled or slipped on us, when we were just calmly lying there on the floor, minding our own business. More often than not, they land on their feet. However, although our story includes perspectives other than the risk we bring, such as the harmonious feeling at home, as well as a reminder of the good (and bad) days gone by, we must admit that it might sometimes be a good idea to put us away for a while. We know that we can be a bit slippery and risky in some homes, but we resent the fact that the story of the ‘risky rug’ is the only story we hear nowadays. Now we wish to address the many meanings of our place in the homes of the elderly.





From the soiled storage shelfs where we have been thrown, from the porches and balconies where we have been pegged up to vent; we are the rag-rugs gathered in resistance. Within the rug are the rags, a diversity of stories interwoven – all of them need to be attentively unwound.

Rugs only turn when rugs learn
Put me out to vent, watch me freeze
Treat me with some dignity, don't treat me like a fool

This rug is tightly woven together
And has a heart of rags



This contribution is based on a project "Tryggt boende för äldre – de vuxna barnens perspektiv" [Safe housing for the elderly - the adult children's perspective] (2013–2015) founded by a grant from Länsförsäkringsbolagens forskningsfond, Sweden.



Contextual note

Regarding safety for the elderly: it is known that elderly people are often injured in their own homes – usually in the living room, bedroom, or entrance – because of illness and/or slipping or tripping on carpets. Based on empirical material from interviews with the elderly and their relatives (their adult children) as well as web-based official government information directed to the elderly and their relatives, we have created a narrative analysis focusing on experiences of risk and security, especially in relation to the handwoven rag-rugs common in Sweden. With the intention of accessing the complexity of perceived security for the elderly, a narrative vignette is crafted as a fictive debate article by the rag-rugs interwoven with lyrics of "the rugs' battle song" (inspired by and with quotations from The Beautiful South's "the table"). The writings illuminate the various narratives of the rugs, depending on who is discussing if there should be carpets on the floors in the homes of elderly or not.

Exile

jason harding

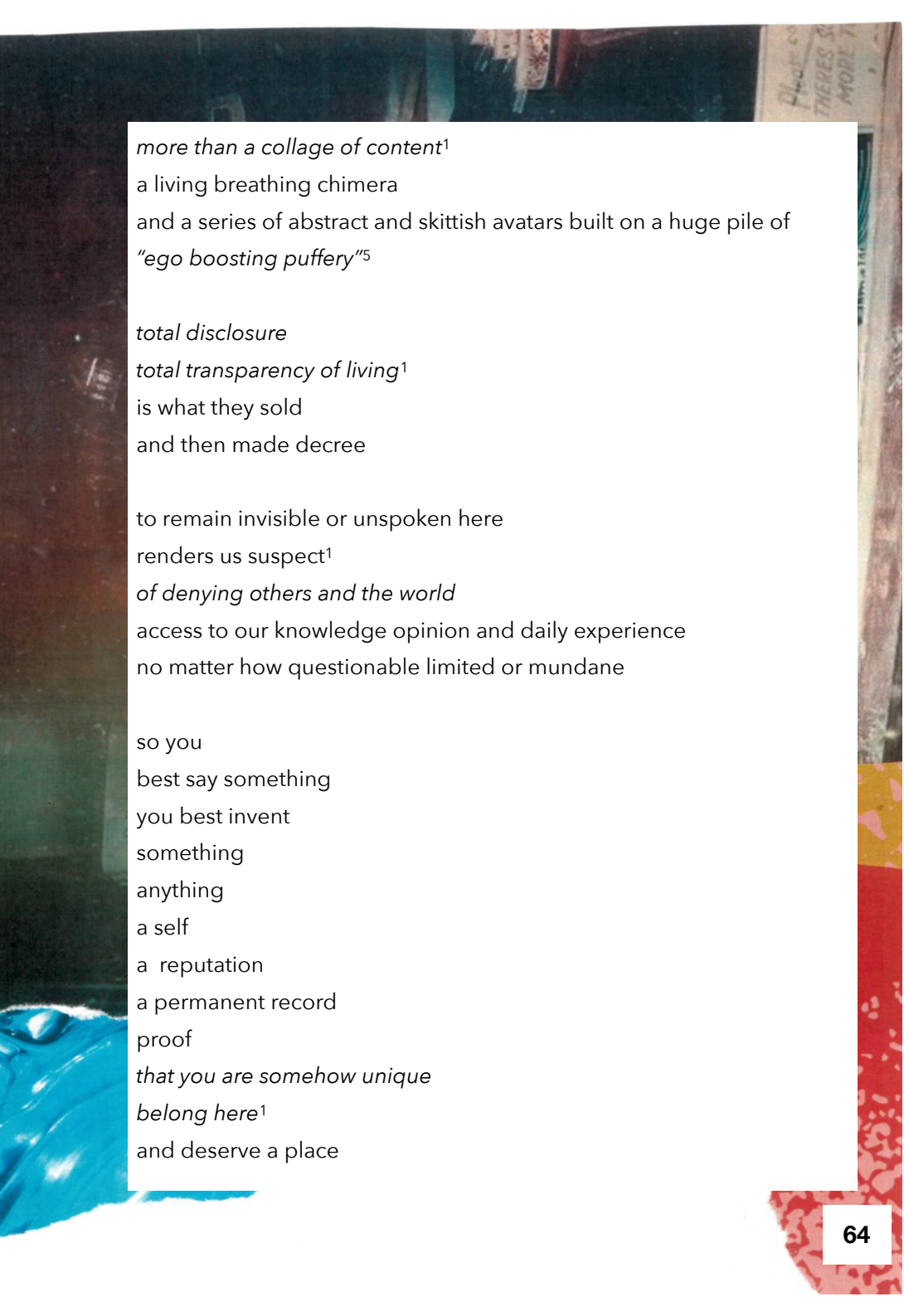
not everyone is a great storyteller
and not everyone has a great story to tell
but we have been convinced that *reality is only*
what we can prove
and preserve by sharing[1]

so we write
fantastic fictions
and we record
often desperately
regardless of whether we have the skill
something worthwhile to say
a focus or grip
on truth

"the self we once knew no longer exists"[2]

and the self we once knew now skates anxiously
across the surface of life[3]
identities tethered
to data and timelines
edited faces
and their edited face facial recognition tags
profiles
beautifully *curated*[4]
the self we once knew became
nothing





more than a collage of content[1]
a living breathing chimera
and a series of abstract and skittish avatars built on a huge pile of
"ego boosting puffery"[5]

total disclosure
total transparency of living[1]
is what they sold
and then made decree

to remain invisible or unspoken here
renders us suspect[1]
of denying others and the world
access to our knowledge opinion and daily experience
no matter how questionable limited or mundane

so you
best say something
you best invent
something
anything
a self
a reputation
a permanent record
proof
that you are somehow unique
belong here[1]
and deserve a place



sujatha fernandes is right though
do so without depth please
nor mystery
no complexity[4] no unknowns no
one will like it

her use of the word eviscerate is savage
to disembowel
take the eyes
deprive
she's justified
"personhood is being reduced"[5]
by illusions
and *"bits"*[5]
defined
and defiled
by software

jaron lanier believes *"this is no longer about us"*[6]
he is a romantic
there is a chance it never was there is a chance
this is
and has always been
about *the big servers*[6] and the
god-like soon to be talking heads in jars *tech entrepreneurs who own them*[7]

this is about power







and invisibles
with no official friends
no followers
nothing to share
nothing to pour into *cloud of information encircling their entire existence*[1]
those wretched invisibles
with no reputation
no repute
no standing

no leash

skate on very thin ice
they are
thieves

charged and found guilty

of "*stealing from humanity's transcendental technological project of self projection*"[1]

they are traitors
and ghosts

social media
demands[1]
you watch me and I
watch you
and then we *"police ourselves*
knowing the corporation that gave us the platform" looks on[3]

wonder why the self that is photographed is run through a series of filters
to ensure it looks like every other self wonder why
"the self that is writing [seems] *so distant from the self that is being written about"*
"social surveillance becomes self surveillance"[3]
terribly effective
in ensuring discipline
and conformity
best approximate supposedly normal behaviours because

social media is a regime[3]

alessandro acquisiti once asked, *'what would a future without secrets look like?'*[8]
and carole cadwalladr recently showed us just how dark a future
with that kind of undertow could be[9]

welcome to
the human use of human beings[10]

richard flanagan once wrote, *"the aim of all dictators is to destroy all private life because it is there we know freedom"*[11]
and here we are
locked in[5]
invisible
totalitarian
nightmare

let yourself fall in *"love*
[with] *a medium made of software*
risk
becoming trapped in someone else's careless thoughts"[5]

i wonder if mark zuckerberg sometimes wakes at night
fast breath and beating heart
anxious sweat wide eyed
terrified
that we'll all just up and leave

a mass exile
followed by a mass exhale

"we cannot have a society in which if two people wish to communicate the only way for that to happen is if its financed by someone who wishes to manipulate them"[5] so

i stopped skating long ago

we may cross paths one day
outside
sit down and talk
slowly pile up those layers[3]
you'll find me
as I you



"quite odd" up close[12]
inconsistent
cognitive dissonance drives contradictory dissidents
forward[13]
and mad

we will laugh at each other and
with each other
because of it and because

invisible and unspoken
forever banished branded as thieves
we traitors
we ghosts
we

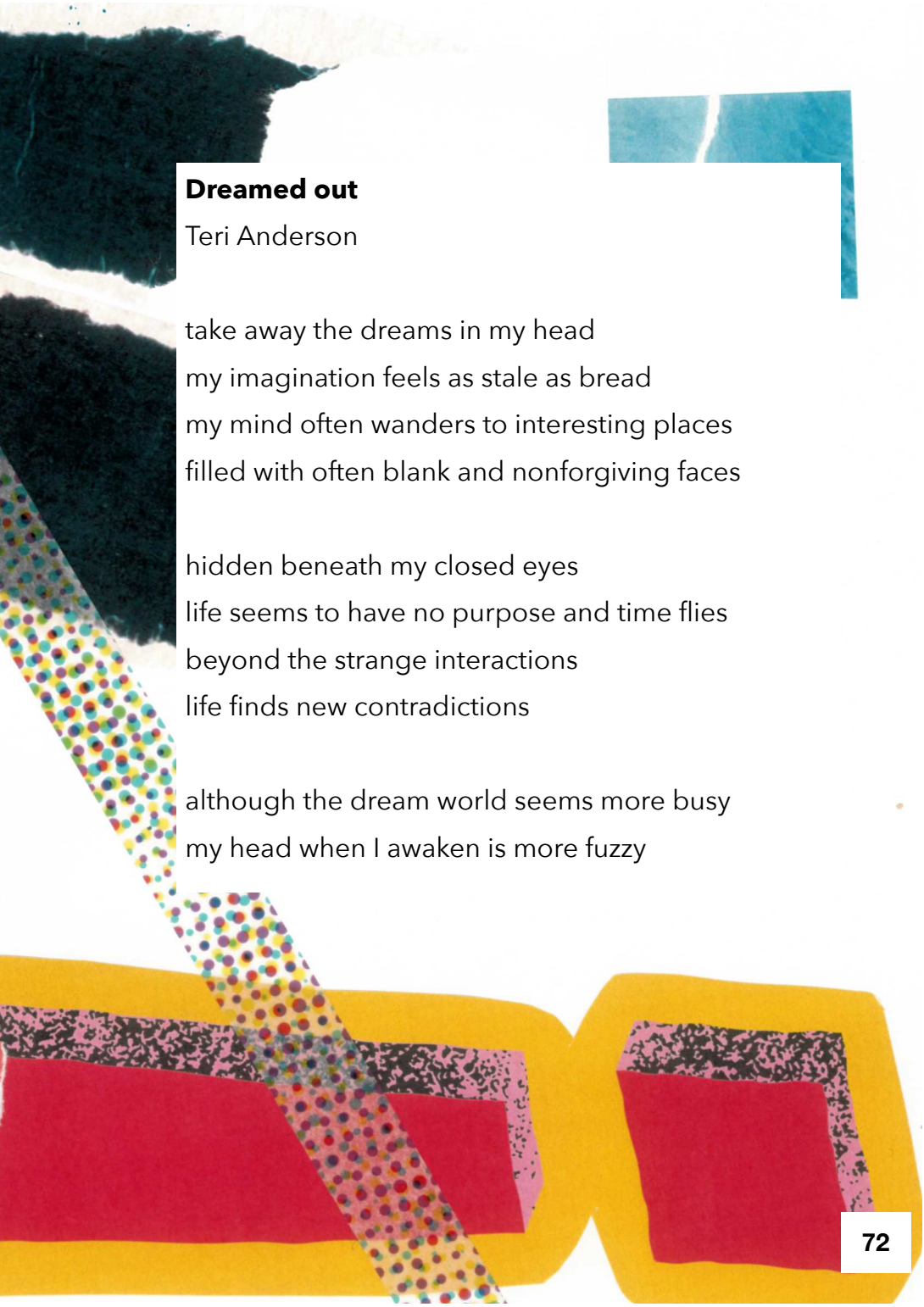
the unfiltered
unedited
unscripted
uncut

we the unpublished
we the unknown

sitting there laughing under
the unfiltered unedited and uncut sun
all rough and raw flawed human ideal
will know we're free
and that our stories are *real*[14].

References

1. Chatfield, T. 2016. Appearances Can Be Deceiving. New Philosopher, 56-58.
2. Dawesar, A. 2013. Life in the “digital now” Speech presented at TEDGlobal 2013, Edinburgh, Scotland.
3. Simmonds, A. 2015. The Frankenstein Of Social Media. Womankind,August - October. 44-47.
4. Fernandes, S. 2018. The evisceration of storytelling. Oxford University Press Blog. https://blog.oup.com/2018/06/curated-stories-storytelling/
5. Lanier, J. 2011. You Are Not A Gadget. Penguin Books. England.
6. Scwartz,O. 2013. Jaron Lanier is a humanist. Dumbo Feather, 37, 80-92.
7. Lanier, J. 2018. How we need to remake the internet. Speech presented at TED 2013, Vancouver, BC, Canada.
8. Acquisiti, A. 2013. What would a future without secrets look like? Speech presented at TEDGlobal 2013. Edinburgh, Scotland.
9. Cadwalladr, C. 2020. Facebook’s role in Brexit - and the threat to democracy. Speech presented at TED2019. Vancouver, BC, Canada.
10. Weiner, N. 1950. The Human Use of Human Beings. Houghton Mifflin. USA.
11. Flanagan, R. 2018. 'things i know'. Smith Journal. Volume 28. p031-032.
12. de-Botton, A. 2016. The Course of Love. Penguin Random House. United Kingdom.
13. Harari, Y. N. 2011. Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind. Penguin Random House. United Kingdom.
14. Thanks Sujatha.



Dreamed out

Teri Anderson

take away the dreams in my head
my imagination feels as stale as bread
my mind often wanders to interesting places
filled with often blank and nonforgiving faces

hidden beneath my closed eyes
life seems to have no purpose and time flies
beyond the strange interactions
life finds new contradictions

although the dream world seems more busy
my head when I awaken is more fuzzy

The Journey

CassiOpeia

A man awakes to the sensation of soft rain falling upon his brow, the time is unknown to him as he sits up to search the sky for the rising sun. 'Early dawn', he thinks to himself as he reaches for the bottle of water that lays beside him, and drinks plentifully. The man scratches at his growing stubble and decides to rise for the day ahead. He unwraps his weathered body from his sleeping pouch, then stands to stretch his limbs. When standing you can see the man has a dishevelled appearance; his flannel shirt creased and edged with dirt, his trainers old and worn. His hair is unruly, as is the growing beard developing upon his youthful face that has aged from many nights sleeping rough on the streets. Whilst rolling up his sleeping pouch and packing his belongings into a Bag for Life, he listens to the sounds of the waking city. The hum of vehicles grows steadily as early workers drive down the main roads surrounding the city centre. The squeaking shutters of store fronts rattle as they open, the man hears the clattering of a window cleaners' equipment as the city begins its daily routine for the new day ahead. The scent of fresh coffee and sweet aromas drift to him as he walks the main strip of shops.

The rain has now stopped, giving way to a clear day as the rising sun warms the city streets. A window of a coffee shop begins to steam up as the man passes by, he must begin his hunt for food and warmth and he decides to start here. Upon entering he is greeted with a cautious smile from the female server who



who was preparing the coffee machine. The man asks with trepidation,

"Do you have any leftovers, from yesterday that is? Anything you cannot sell today?". The server's smile fades, "We're not allowed to give away food that has expired anymore, I'm sorry". The man thanks her and steps out into the cold street.

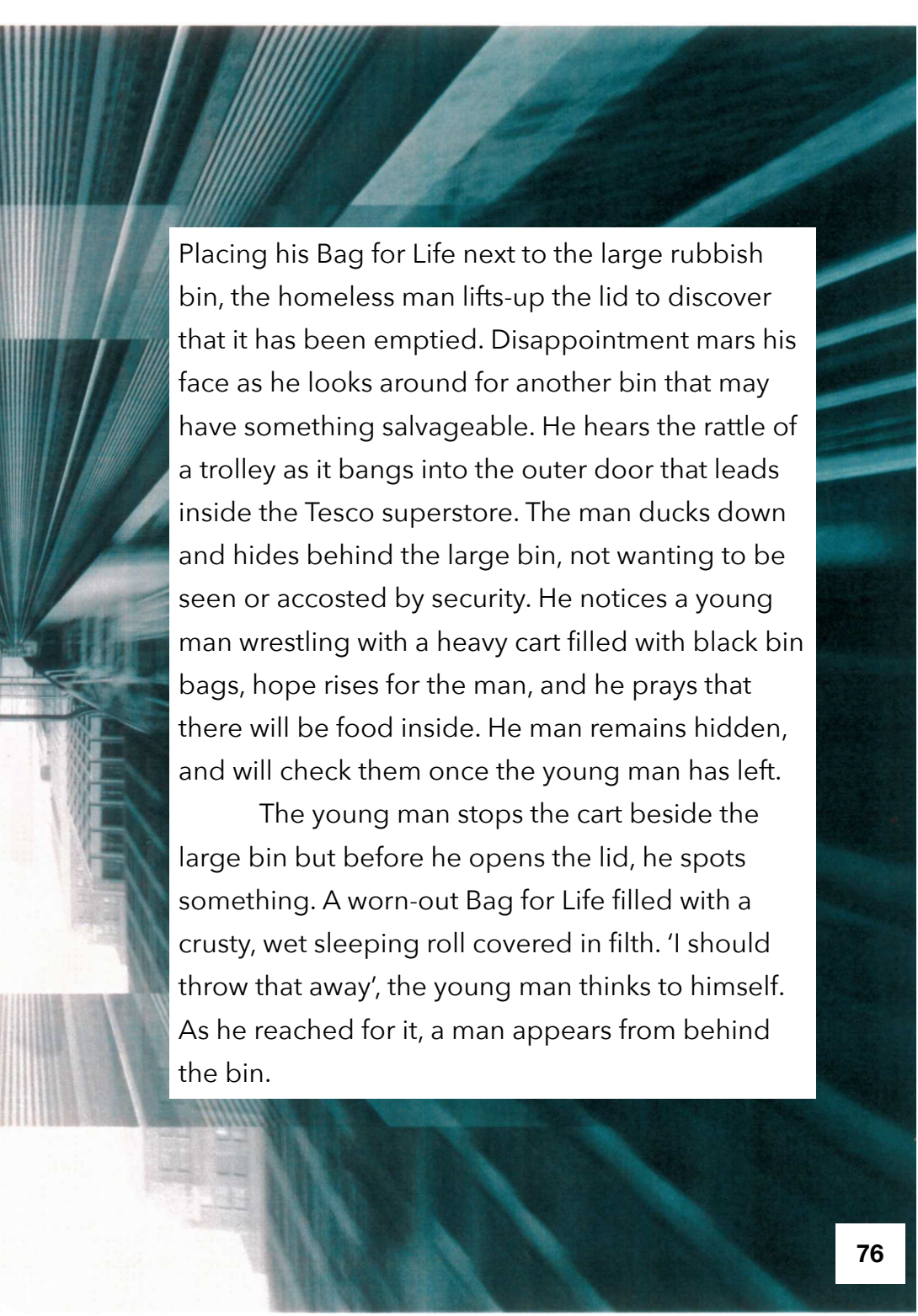
The next shopfront he visits the doors are locked; the café is not open yet; but inside he can see a man sweeping the floor. He decides not to knock on the door, but instead he looked to the green bags sitting outside the café. The rubbish collectors have not been to the city centre yet; he notes, businesses do not open for another hour or so. He looks behind him to the man sweeping; he has not been noticed yet. The man grabs the green rubbish bag and rips it open to find used napkins, plastic cutlery and scraps of food topped with ground coffee waste. There was nothing of use in the first bag, so he moved onto the next. He looks up to find two people in the distance walking towards him, a woman wrapped in a thick coat looking down at her phone and a young boy; bundled up in a scarf and hat singing a school tune, trying to get his mother's attention. The man must move quickly as he does not want to be noticed picking through rubbish for his food. He grabs the second bag and slings it over his shoulder, in the other hand he picks up his Bag for Life and begins to walk away from the

mother and son. He turns down a side street and looks out for other people walking in his direction, he stops, rips open the second bag hurriedly only to find used coffee cups, coffee grinds and other bits of plastic waste. With the lack of food scraps, his stomach begins to ache, he ate his remaining food the night before which was gifted to him by a young couple leaving Sainsbury's, his search continues. 'Perhaps there will be packaged goods in the bins behind Tesco', he thinks to himself, but he must hurry before the rubbish collectors make it first and the streets become too occupied. The man begins the short walk towards the back of the big Tesco superstore, the rain picks up again, as does his speed.





Inside the staff room at Tesco a young man is cleaning the space after the early workers have had their breakfast. Half-eaten packets of crisps lay on the tables, used bottles of water and coffee cups are dotted about the room. The young man collects the rubbish into a bin bag already filled with expired sandwiches left on the counter for the staff. He drops them into the black bag with the rest of the rubbish, 'What a waste' the young man thinks to himself. He takes the black bag out into the hall, places it on his cart and heads toward the exit. He opens the door and steps out into a drizzly cold morning.



Placing his Bag for Life next to the large rubbish bin, the homeless man lifts-up the lid to discover that it has been emptied. Disappointment mars his face as he looks around for another bin that may have something salvageable. He hears the rattle of a trolley as it bangs into the outer door that leads inside the Tesco superstore. The man ducks down and hides behind the large bin, not wanting to be seen or accosted by security. He notices a young man wrestling with a heavy cart filled with black bin bags, hope rises for the man, and he prays that there will be food inside. He man remains hidden, and will check them once the young man has left.

The young man stops the cart beside the large bin but before he opens the lid, he spots something. A worn-out Bag for Life filled with a crusty, wet sleeping roll covered in filth. 'I should throw that away', the young man thinks to himself. As he reached for it, a man appears from behind the bin.

AUTHOR BIOS

CassiOpeia is a young female writer, performance poet and photographer based in the North West of England. She is currently completing her Sociology Degree at University of Chester, focusing on Environmentalism and Climate Change challenges within lower class communities.

Charlotte Bates is a sociologist at Cardiff University. Together with Kate Moles, she is currently working on a multisensory ethnography of wild swimming in the UK.

Erika Wall is an associate professor in Sociology and senior lecturer in Rehabilitation Science at the Department of Health Sciences, Mid Sweden University. Using mostly qualitative methods, including creative and visual approaches, Erika focuses on the creation of meaning about risk and safety, especially related to health/ill health.

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in *Antipodes, Communion, cordite, Eureka Street, Griffith Review, Journal of Working Class Studies, Meniscus,* & *Shaping the Fractured Self* (UWAP). His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press.

J.E. Sumerau is an associate professor and the director of applied sociology at the University of Tampa. She is the author of 5 novels, 5 research monographs, and numerous articles, chapters and short stories exploring sexualities, gender, health, religion, and violence in society. For more information, visit www.jsumerau.com.

AUTHOR BIOS

jason harding is an academic, artist and graphic designer based in australia. dreams of one day creating something beautiful. something that truly has weight. and being permitted the luxury and liberty of going completely mad in the process. you can find some of his work and process at *jasonharding.com*

Jens Ljungdahl is a photographer with a master's degree in Sociology working as a junior lecturer in Rehabilitation Science at the Department of Health Sciences, Mid Sweden University. In his research, Jens is interested in social identity, especially in connection to meanings of home and spatial experiences.

Joe Cleary is an Assistant Professor in the Sociology Department at Buffalo State College (SUNY). He is an autoethnographer and an ethnographer of schools and workplaces. He grew up in suburban Connecticut, roughly 60 miles north of Midtown Manhattan. He lives in Buffalo.

John-Paul Smiley is a writer and independent scholar. He has a PhD in Civil and Building Engineering (Loughborough, UK), an MSc Social Research (Leicester, UK), and a BA Politics and Sociology (York, UK). His interests include futurism and science fiction, as well as politics and sociology. He tweets at @JohnPaulSmiley

Jonny Bergman is a senior lecturer in Sociology at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mid Sweden University. From critical sociological and feminist perspectives, he seeks to get wiser and address issues around power and resistance in societal, group and individual meaning-making focusing on privilege, intersectionality, risk and work.

AUTHOR BIOS

Leanne Downing is a digital media academic who writes regularly on the topics of digital media, health and the emotions. She has a PhD in Media Studies and is an Adjunct Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University. She is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Vitalities Lab in the Centre for Social Research in Health at the University of New South Wales in Sydney.

Lily Mae Kroese is a wild swimmer, illustrator and animator.

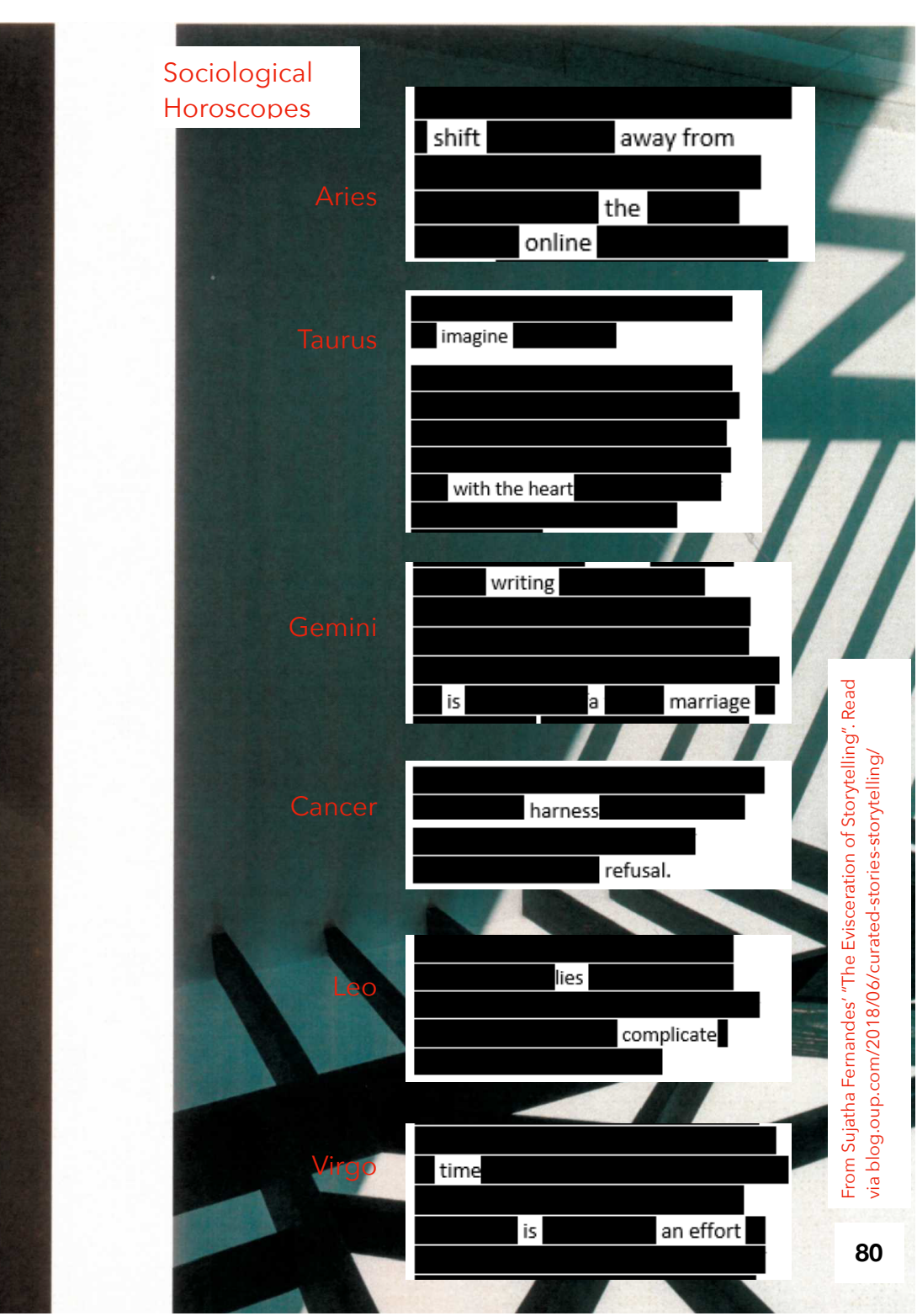
Mardi Wilson is a writer, sociologist and PhD scholar. Her areas of interest are gender, sex, social justice, and body politics. Mardi also works as a domestic violence specialist at a violence prevention service.

Nicole Brown is Director of a Social Research & Practice and Education Ltd. and Lecturer at UCL Institute of Education. Her research interests relate to physical and material representations, metaphors, research methods for social sciences and arts-based and creative approaches to data collection and analysis. She tweets as @ncjbrown.

Sujatha Fernandes is a writer and Professor of Sociology at the University of Sydney. She is the author of several academic monographs, including most recently *Curated Stories: The Uses and Misuses of Storytelling* (2017). Her literary work includes a memoir on a global hip hop life, *Close to the Edge* (2011), and a collection of essays entitled *The Cuban Hustle* (2020). Her essays and short stories have appeared in T*he New York Times, The Nation, The New Ohio Review, The Maine Review*, and *Aster(ix),* among other places.

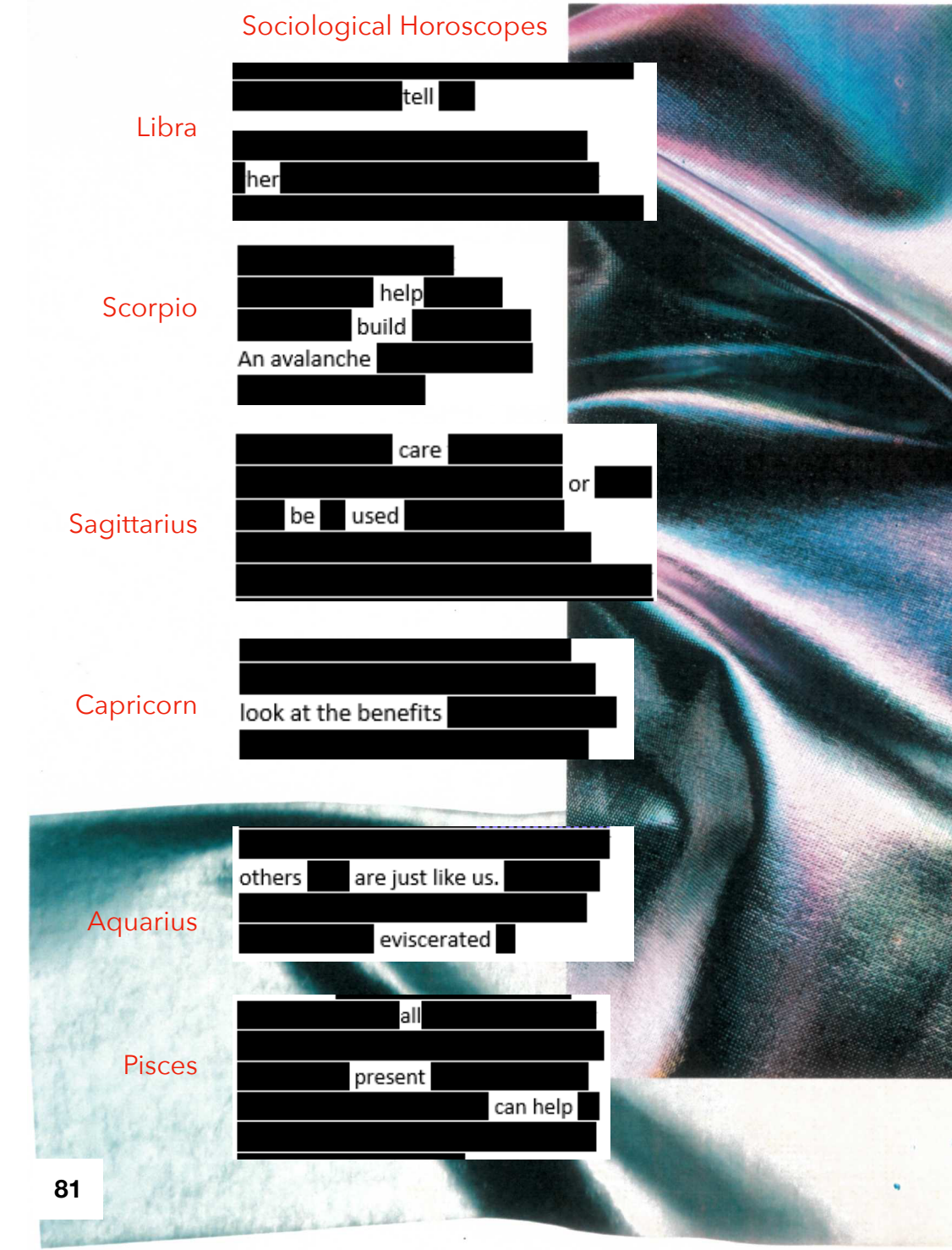
Teri Anderson creates work that looks into the idea of craft in art, textiles, installation and sculpture to create a linear or surreal environment which the audience have to inhabit. The work links to her heritage and how textiles were key in their family history including sample machinists and pattern cutters.

Sociological Horoscopes



From Sujatha Fernandes' "The Evisceration of Storytelling". Read via blog.oup.com/2018/06/curated-stories-storytelling/

Sociological Horoscopes



Libra

[redacted] tell [redacted]

[redacted] her [redacted]

Scorpio

[redacted] help [redacted]

[redacted] build [redacted]

An avalanche [redacted]

Sagittarius

[redacted] care [redacted]

[redacted] or [redacted]

[redacted] be [redacted] used [redacted]

Capricorn

[redacted]

look at the benefits [redacted]

Aquarius

[redacted]

others [redacted] are just like us. [redacted]

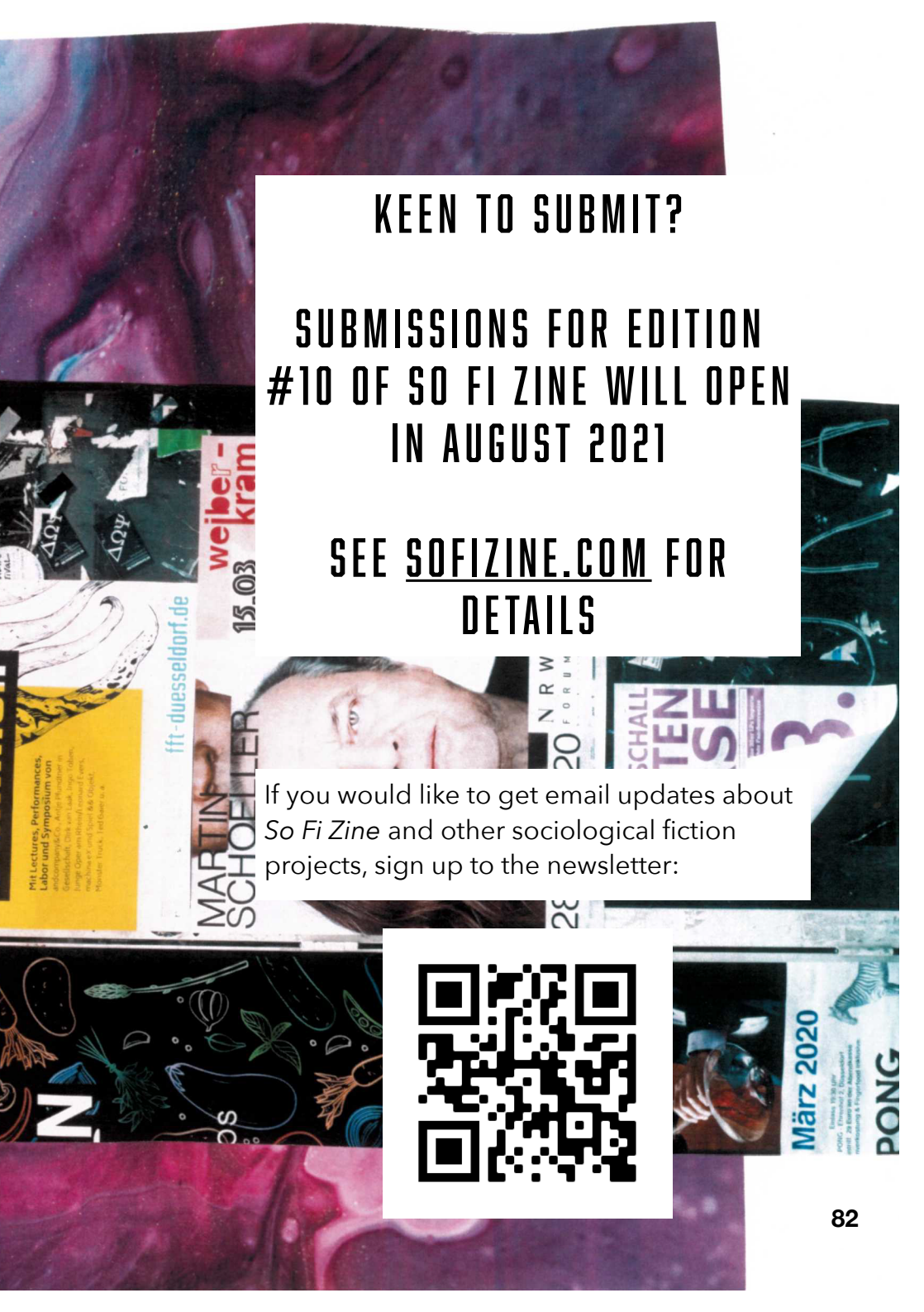
[redacted] eviscerated [redacted]

Pisces

[redacted] all [redacted]

[redacted] present [redacted]

[redacted] can help [redacted]

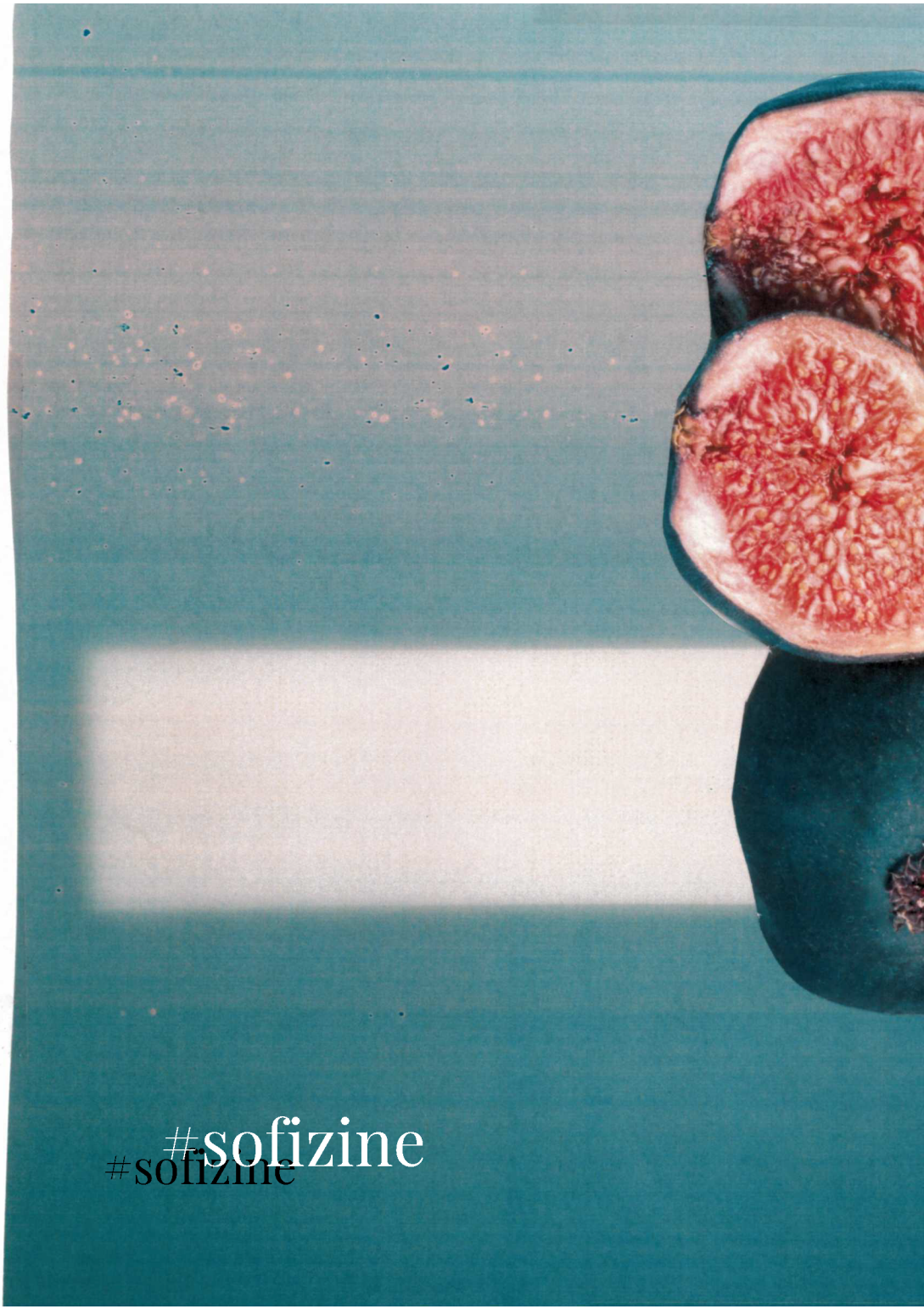


KEEN TO SUBMIT?

SUBMISSIONS FOR EDITION #10 OF SO FI ZINE WILL OPEN IN AUGUST 2021

SEE SOFIZINE.COM FOR DETAILS

If you would like to get email updates about *So Fi Zine* and other sociological fiction projects, sign up to the newsletter:


#sofizine
#sofizine